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COMIC SCENE

★★★★★

PRESENTS

THE BEST OF BATMAN

BATTLE OF THE BATS

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Welcome to the this

ComicScene Comic Club Exclusive Publication

featuring the best Batman articles from ComicScene Magazine.

Enjoy.

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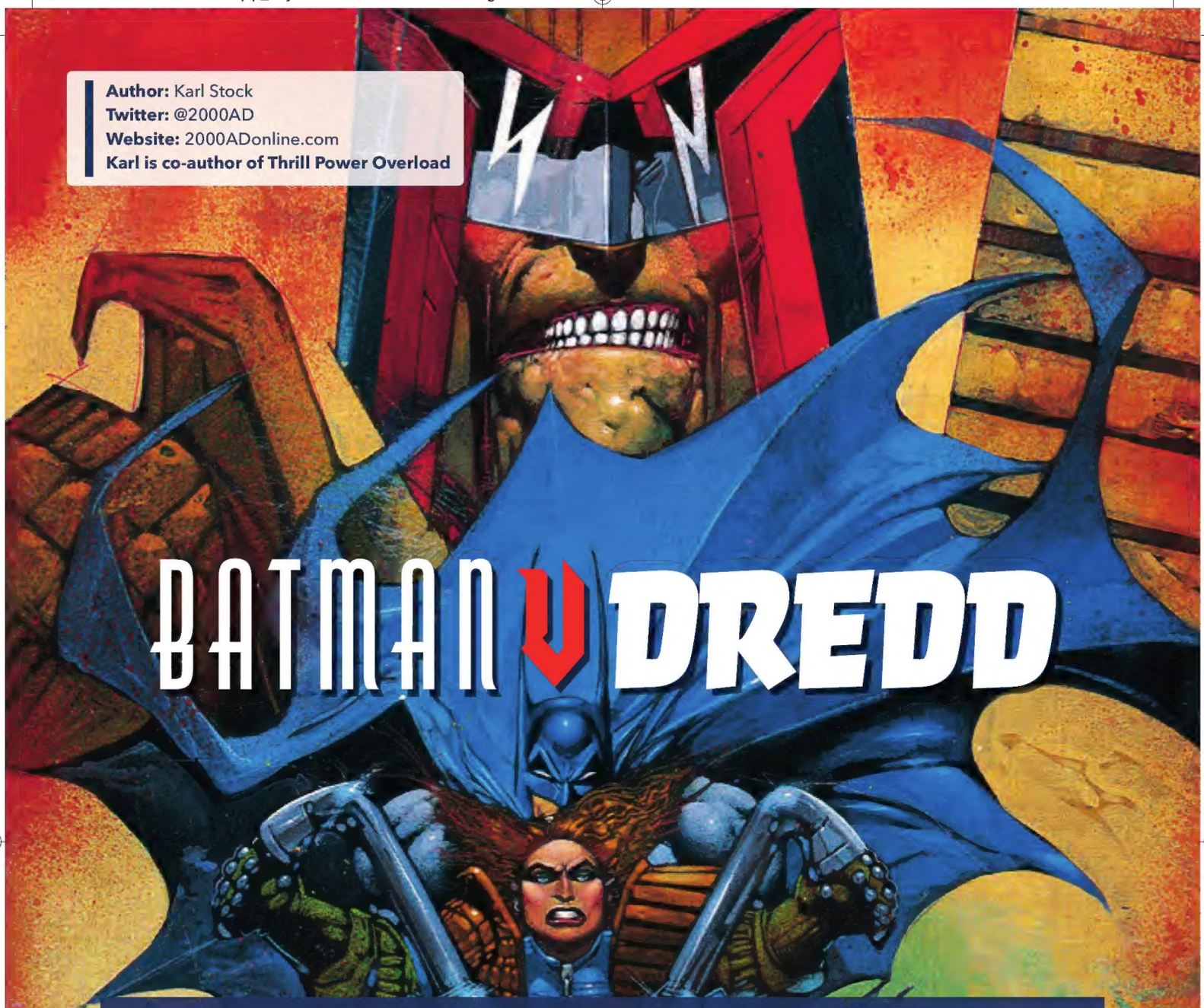


BATMAN V DREDD

"I wasn't surprised by the book's success," says Alan Grant of Judgement on Gotham, the original Batman / Judge Dredd team-up from 1991. A huge commercial hit, it was arguably the most successful appearance the future lawman ever made in America in his purest form, the watered-down film versions notwithstanding.

Batman and Dredd are both idols with their respective fans, and I figured both sets of readers would pick up on the team-up," continues Grant, "and the fact the artwork was by Simon Bisley just made that more likely. I'd point out that after a first issue, sales would generally fall quite far and quite fast. When Simon did the first Lobo mini-series (with Grant and writer Keith Giffen for DC), sales actually went up by around 50,000 for issue two. That was an unheard of state of affairs, which just emphasised his popularity with the readers."

At the time, everything was lined up perfectly. Grant was one of the key writers on DC's Batman titles, his long-time 2000AD writing partner (and Dredd's co-creator) John Wagner had the reins on Dredd, and Simon Bisley's just-finished run of visceral painted art on Slaine: The Horned God had turned him into the hottest and most influential British comic artist of the '90s. Yet easy synchronicity like this glosses over the fact it had taken a couple of false starts for the story to come to fruition.

"As far as I recall, it was the powers-that-be at (then-2000AD publisher) Fleetway who actually made the suggestion (of putting Dredd and Batman together)," says Grant. "It made a lot of sense, so Fleetway spoke directly to DC and everybody agreed." In fact, Grant has said that the suggestion was originally made some years before Tim Burton's 1989 Batman film gave the Caped Crusader a huge shot of publicity, and DC desperately agreed in the hope that any gimmick would boost Batman's flagging sales.

The first idea, apparently, was to give the project to Alan Moore and Brian Bolland, but despite Bolland's rep-

tion as one of the classic Dredd artists, Wagner and Grant – then Dredd's well-entrenched writing partnership – made it known they weren't happy with their character being passed to another writer. Instead, Moore and Bolland created Batman: The Killing Joke, which was released in 1988 and became a huge and enduring success.

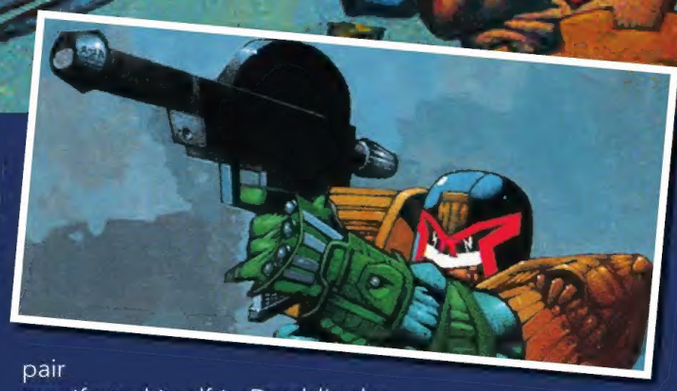
Next, artists Alan Davis and Paul Neary were approached, but the money on offer wasn't enough for them to turn down becoming the artists on Marvel's new British-set X-book Excalibur; although Davis did illustrate a kind of trial run for a Batman/Dredd team-up, when Wagner wrote the visually similar Dredd one-off 'Bat Mugger' for him in 1988's 2000AD prog 585, the artist's last work for 2000AD.

In the end, the final shape of Judgement on Gotham was partly down to Wagner eventually agreeing to do it when he did. No fan of superheroes, he had originally been cold on the idea, but his definitive take on Dredd and Grant's deep understanding of Batman (and Judge Anderson, the Mega-City Psi-Judge who played mediator to the two men of violence) created a perfect balance.

The story also set the trio up against Dredd's principal Rogue's Gallery members, the other-dimensional mass-killer Judge Death and the dim-witted but hyper-violent cyborg Mean Machine Angel, with Batman's enemy Scarecrow drafted in as a fearsome foil for Death. As Grant told Peter Sanderson for Comics Alliance at the time, the treatment which he and Wagner originally had accepted was a serious and straightforward horror idea; but when they came to write it, they junked their first plan with the new brief, "let's see if we can come up with something that makes us happy while we're writing it, that gives us a laugh."

Bisley's painted work was a revelation, marrying a clear understanding of the characters looks and personalities with a taste for punkish, heavy metal violence and an irreverent cartoon humour. "I can't remember who first suggested Simon, but both John and I were one hundred percent behind him," says Grant now. "Since I first saw his work I was a fan - he brought an energy to comics that was sorely needed at the time. I thought he did a brilliant job, I don't believe there was any other artist who could have pulled it off so successfully."

Grant told Sanderson that "the bond that (Dredd and Batman) form is a bond of intense mutual hatred," and many readers were surprised that the relationship between the pair manifested itself in Dredd's clear physical superiority, with more emphasis placed on Batman's sense of determination. "There was little debate about the dynamic between the characters," says Grant. "Both may be crime fighters, but it was happening in Dredd's city and as a vigilante Batman was, by definition, a perp. This meant that Batman was unlikely to be listened to, because it was Dredd's POV which was more important."



Judgement on Gotham was such a definitive success that it inspired three further Wagner and Grant-written sequels; Vendetta in Gotham (1993, with art by Cam Kennedy), The Ultimate Riddle (1995, by Carl Critchlow and Dermot Power) and Die Laughing (1998, by Glenn Fabry and Jim Murray). The first two books in the series are being released jointly this spring as the first of current 2000AD publisher Rebellion's new 'digest' series, with a smaller size and price, because, says editor Oliver Ball, "they're both fast-paced self-contained stories, making a great 'stand-alone' read as well as a good entry-point for newer readers. We wanted to launch the series with a well-known classic that has been out of print for some time and is often requested by fans."

"No publisher would ever turn down the likelihood of a nice profit, so I understand perfectly why (Fleetway and DC) wanted the sequels," says Grant. "We chose subsequent artists on the strength of how much we liked their work. Bisley set them a massive success to live up to, and I thought they all pulled it off well."

Within this new collection two very different tones stand alongside one another, from Bisley's bold painting to Kennedy's technically brilliant draughtsmanship. "I remember I wasn't keen on the first one, because it had all the faces bursting open and the blood," says the latter artist now. "But boys will be boys, eh? It was a fun job... anything that involved Dredd was fun, and I also got to do the dark Batman I'd always wanted to. They were two counterweights, and it was a great wee idea putting them together."

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BATMAN IN THE 1930'S

In the latter half of the 1930's, National Allied Publications, (later to become known as DC Comics,) released Superman on an unsuspecting world. The sole survivor of the planet krypton was a runaway success, so naturally enough the publishers wanted more superheroes, so they **turned to aspiring writers and artists for new ideas**.

Enter twenty four year old Bob Kane, who had come up with the idea of the Bat-Man after being influenced by the design drawings of Leonardo Di Vinci's flying machine, as well as current pulp characters of the day such as Doc Savage and the Shadow, along with Douglas Fairbanks' Zorro and Roland West's the Bat Whispers.

Liking the idea of a human bat, and the fact that this new character seemed the complete opposite to the Man of Steel, the publishers told Kane to get to it. So he set to work but after his initial design of this new anti-hero turned out to be less than inspiring, Bob Kane turned to ghost writer extraordinaire Bill Finger to help flesh out his original idea.

Upon seeing Kane's initial concept and finding it lacking in the mystery department, Mr Finger took the bull by the horns and made suggestions of his own, changes that have altered very little, design-wise, to this very day.

Kane's original idea for the costume was a startling red body suit with a domino mask for the eyes, pretty much like the one a certain Boy Wonder would come to wear a year later. The only thing remotely bat-like about the garish get-up was the rigid black scalloped wings on the back, which actually looked like they would be more of a hindrance than anything else. This "Bat-Man" wasn't even wearing gloves!

With Finger's suggestions that the character needed to be more, well…bat-like, the cowl and ears were added along with the gloves and a flowing scalloped cape, and in May of 1939, Batman burst forth onto the comic scene in issue twenty seven of Detective Comics with such resounding success that both he and Superman together ushered in what is now referred to as the Golden Age of Comics.

However, this was quite a different Batman to the one we know today. For starters he

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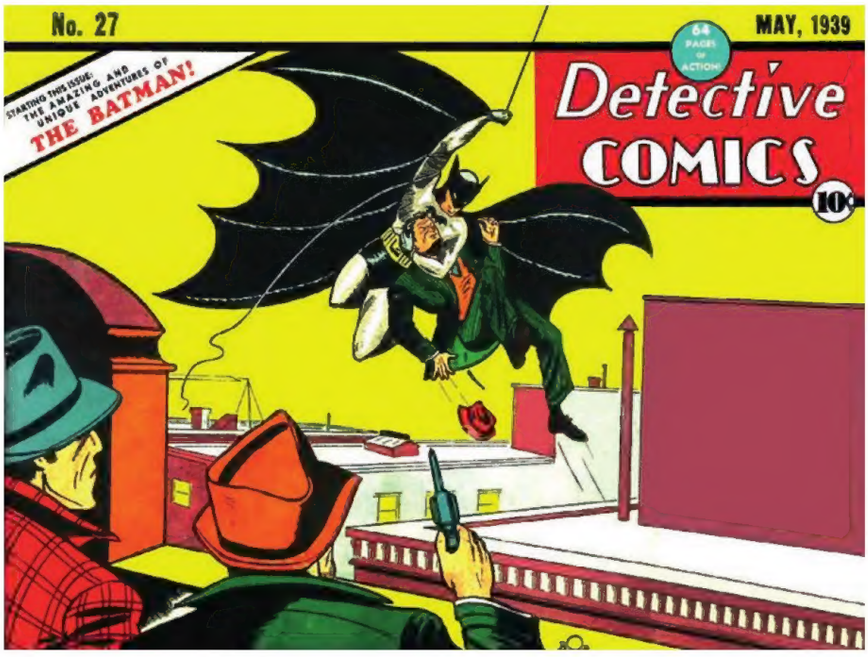


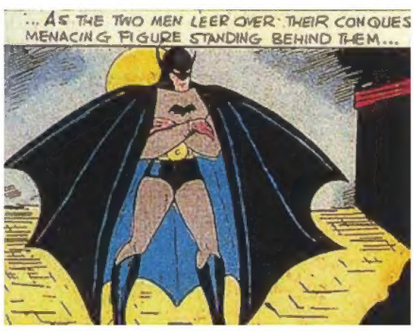
was a far more ruthless crime fighter, believing that you fought fire with fire, not even thinking twice when taking the life of a dastardly villain with his gun. He had no qualms when it came to dealing harshly with lawbreakers. If the punishment fit the crime, then so be it.

Early Batman stories seemed to be more of an amalgamation of the comics that were available at the time, such as Dick Tracy or Doc Savage, and you couldn't have been blamed if you thought you were reading a story about the Shadow, since there was more than a striking similarity between the two vigilantes.

The villains that the wet-behind-the-bat-ears hero faced were in the vein of the moustache twirling mad scientist type, as well as the hardened but glass-jawed gangsters who Batman practically ate for breakfast. The odd supernatural beastie would raise its ugly head occasionally to give the storyline a real supernatural, almost horror story feel to the proceedings, thus catering for all tastes, at least that was what they hoped.

His first foray in issue twenty seven, "The case of the Criminal Syndicate," was a very hardboiled introduction to Batman, giving us a man who meted out justice on his terms, yet there was very little in the way of motivation as to what drove millionaire Bruce Wayne to don the mantle of the Bat and beat criminals to death on a nightly ritual. And it wasn't until issue thirty three in November of 1939 that we learned of Bruce's tragic childhood and the events that forged him to dedicate his life and fortune to fighting crime.

As the early issues progressed, so we were introduced to the vast array of bat themed gadgets and vehicles that the Batman would employ in his one man war on crime. Even the costume is altered slightly, improved upon as we're taken along for the ride. Bill Finger was really getting into his stride with Gotham's guardian.



Though Batman was Bob Kane's idea, it was Mr Finger who put all the meat on the bones of the character, giving us the dual identity of Bruce Wayne. Police Commissioner Gordon was created to give a tool for exposition in the stories, as well as allowing Batman to keep tabs on the bad guys. As time would progress, Finger's prodigious creative outpouring would give us all the tropes we know and love about the Caped Crusader today.

There was the Batcave, Alfred the butler, the Joker, all of Batman's gadgets and equipment, along with most of his nefarious Rogues gallery. Even Gotham City, perhaps the next most important character in the Batman mythos next to the Dark Knight himself sprang from Finger's feverish mind. The list goes on and on…

Bob Kane sold his rights to Batman to DC on the proviso that he alone be named as the creator of the Batman and the strange world he lived in. So in every comic book, cinematic adventure serial, four colour pop art TV show and blockbuster movie to follow, Bob Kane's name was lauded as sole creator, leaving Bill Finger forgotten.

Kane went on to become a wealthy man, all the time refuting that anyone else had any creative input in the Batman. Kane would later regret denying Bill Finger's input, even stating that he should have been recognised as co-creator. But by then it was too late.

Bill Finger died in 1974, penniless and alone.

Mr Finger was a quiet, reserved man, whom people knew very little about, and indeed it was a rarity that the co-creator of perhaps the greatest mystery character in comic book history turns out to be an even greater enigma himself.

Today he is recognised for his input into the Dark Knight Detective (he even created that moniker too…) though for me personally it's too little too late.

Thanks mainly to Finger's prolific imagination Batman became an instant hit, and so pleased were the publishers with Batman's adventures, and only too eager to make hay while the sun shined, it wasn't long before Batman would go on to get a title all his own. In the meantime, however, they wanted Batman to be toned down slightly and become more kid friendly in the hopes of selling even more comics.

Once again they turned to Bill Finger, who would in answer to this, go on to create Robin the Boy Wonder in issue thirty eight of Detective Comics in 1940.

But that's a whole new decade, and a chapter for another day.

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BATMAN IN THE 1940'S

The decade of the Dynamic Duo...

Any self-respecting comic fan will tell you that the Batman first appeared in the hallowed pages of Detective Comics in 1939. His early appearances gave us a character that was darker and more menacing than the denizens of evil he faced down with each issue. But that was Bruce Wayne's idiom, in that "Criminals are a superstitious, cowardly lot..." He fought crime with excessive force, bringing a gun to a knife fight- quite literally in some cases!

Pleased with their newest superstar, DC, or National as they were still known at the time wanted to broaden the readership for the comic, wanting to introduce younger kids to the Caped Crusader. And what better way to do it than bring in a new character that the youngsters could identify with more.

So by issue thirty eight of Detective Comics the general comic reading populace were introduced to young Dick Grayson, Bruce Wayne's ward and fellow crime fighter, more commonly known as Robin the Boy Wonder.

The birth of the Dynamic Duo was an instant smash hit, and by the spring of 1940 Batman and Robin were debuting in their first ever solo book, entitled Batman. The launch issue contained a combination of stories, starting with a bare bones telling of Batman's origin, and how he was born as a result of the murder of his parents, with the young Bruce swearing vengeance against all evildoers.

Although the introduction of Robin was also meant to tone down the harshness and violence of the stories, the premiere issue introduced us to comicdom's definitive arch enemy; the Joker. He would become the yin to Batman's yang, and his first foray into the murky shadows of Gotham left the story littered with bodies.

Another self-contained solo Batman tale in this colossal issue finds Batman going up against an enemy, who for me is the equal of the Joker when it comes to the scare factor of the character. The gentleman's name was Dr Hugo Strange, who brought a whole different level of weird to Batman's already warped reality.

The villains at first seemed to be created as throwaway characters, whose sole purpose was to be the latest protagonist of the month and that was it. But so good was ghost writer Bill Finger at giving these twisted bad guys a depth not seen before in comics, that whether intentional or not, Finger was giving us the beginnings of Batman's Rogues Gallery.

Not only did issue one give us not one, but two Joker stories, as well as the creepy Hugo Strange, we got a glimpse at a character that would return again and again, becoming a thorn, (or is that claw,) in Batman's side for years to come: Catwoman.

The decade of the forties gave us everything we've come to expect as part of a Batman and Robin staple diet, and although Bob Kane's name was pinned to the splash page of every issue, naming him as sole creator of the Dark Knight, this was stretching reality a wee tad. One had only to compare the dissimilar variety in the art to realise that more than one hand was on the paint brush. So numerous were the comics and syndicated newspaper strips of the 1940's that ghost writers and artists were brought on board to help churn out what one man could never do alone.

Artist Dick Sprang is mostly associated with Batman during this decade, depicting him more like an Olympic weightlifter in stature, complete with barrel chest. Batman was all bulk and beefcake when compared to artist Jerry Robinson's version. He gave us a sleeker Batman, who was lithe and athletic and fast. Robinson's pencils also seemed more grounded in reality, giving a world more identifiable to the reader. But both artists gave us something else previously unseen before and that was a Batman that smiled!

Although the approach was a lighter tone, the cavalcade of villainy heading the Dynamic Duo's way was as weird as ever.

There was Basil Karlo; an actor who turned to the dark side after going bonkers when he found out a film of his was to be remade, with another actor in the lead role.

He became Clayface. Batman and Robin foiled his plans, but he would return later with shapeshifting powers.

Jervis Tetch was another creepy character whose fixation for headwear would see him adopt the moniker of the Mad Hatter, a truly dangerous and disturbed adversary who had a penchant for mind control and hypnotism. He coveted Batman's cowl above all things.

Oswald Cobblepot, more commonly known as the Penguin is a bird themed master criminal with a vast array of deadly umbrellas. He may look comical, but his intellect for criminality makes him a dangerous bird with a sharp beak.

Edward Nigma's Riddler popped up in Detective Comics issue 140 in 1948. This trickster likes to tease his crimes with clues and puzzles. Nigma is quite possibly smarter than the Caped Crusader, and could possibly hold the title of arch enemy, if only he wasn't so obsessed with his game-playing.

The sinister Scarecrow first appeared in World's Finest Comics in 1941, and is perhaps Batman's most unsettling villain next to the Joker. Through the added combination of psychology, psychopharmacology and toxins created by him, Scarecrow quite literally scares his victims to death.

Rounding out this motley crew is Harvey Dent's warped psychosis in the form of Two-Face. He first showed his, um, two faces in Detective issue 66 in 1942. His Jekyll/Hyde personalities were always fixated with crimes that had a number two theme to them. He particularly had a loathing for a certain Boy Wonder.

Certain bad guys came and went, but others stayed the course, returning again and again to cross swords with the guardians of Gotham City, and let's face it, they were just too good to be dispatched with once and for all.

Along with the Rogues Gallery came the bat themed gadgets and vehicles, starting with the now legendary utility Belt, which at one point seemed to contain everything from aspirin to the kitchen sink! Dreamed up by writer Gardner Fox for Detective issue 29 in 1939, the belt contained capsules that emitted a choking gas when thrown. From then on the belt has housed a vast array of gadgetry, allowing Batman and Robin to extricate themselves out of some very tight spots on more than one occasion.

With all his crime fighting equipment cluttering up Wayne Manor, Batman needed a place to stash it all away from prying eyes. So a secret lair was dreamed up, giving batman a base of operations which also allowed him to keep his two identities separate.

Starting off as little more than a secret tunnel that led to a disused barn that housed the Batmobile, what was to become the Batcave evolved into something much, much more. With his popularity soaring, Batman went to the movies, quite literally, starring in a fifteen episodic action thriller with a cliff-hanger at the end of each instalment. Here we found Batman and Robin as sort of government agents, and with it being wartime; we found them fighting the evil Japanese dictator called Dr Daka.

During the making of the serial, Bob Kane visited the set and noted that the secret entrance to the Batcave was in the study of Wayne Manor, through the grandfather clock. This idea was soon incorporated into both comic and newspaper strips and has been a part of the Batman canon ever since.

As essential as the Batcave was to Batman mythos, no story was ever complete without the series' second most important character, that being Gotham City itself, that *!!@#?!-hole of a town where evil lurks around every darkened alley.

First identified in issue 4 of Batman, Gotham is synonymous with crime, and placing Batman in a different locale only seems to diminish his shadow somewhat. Gotham needs its protector, but just as equally, Batman needs Gotham.

The 1940's saw the Batman turn from a brooding, murderous vigilante into a square jawed all American hero, even encouraging children and adults alike to help in the war effort by buying war bonds, collect scrap metal and even salvage paper, and many an issue printed during the war years would have covers showing Batman, Robin and even Superman meting out justice to the Japanese or the Nazis. Could you imagine that happening today?

The forties built the foundations of Batman's world, populating it with characters just as popular now as when the artists first put pen to paper all those years ago. And before you know it, the 1950's is soon upon us all. But with a new decade looming just over the horizon, Batman would confront a new threat that would tax even the multi-problem solving utility belt of the Dark Knight. And that villain was to be called… censorship!

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BATMAN in the 1950's

Ask any avid comic reader which hero has the greatest rogue's gallery and nine times out of ten they'll usually say the Batman. Personally I always thought it was the Amazing Spider-Man, but that's a conversation for another day.

But out of the myriad menagerie of mindboggling misfits the Caped Crusader has gone up against in his colourful career, none have dealt him a deadlier blow than in the decade of the 1950's, when psychologist Dr Frederic Wertham and the publication of his book The Seduction of the Innocent floored the entire comic book industry.

Wertham's scathing attack on the medium was in the form of an accusation that comics as a whole was to blame for inciting delinquency in the minds of impressionable American children, and the crime based comics in particular were helping to breed a generation of maladjusted youths who would later go on to crimes themselves.

Trying to head trouble off at the pass, the publishing industry created a self-governing body known as the Comics Code Authority voluntarily to allay intervention by the U.S. Senate. But it turned out to be too little too late, a result of which saw the demise of many publishing houses. Jobs were lost and the comic industry was changed forever. DC Comics or National as they were known at the time came under fire too. Wertham put forward the idea that Superman was a fascist, undermining authority figures such as the Police with his own brand of justice.

"...a result of which saw the demise of many publishing houses. **Jobs were lost** and the comic industry was changed forever."

As for Batman and Robin, well they were nothing more than a blatant advertisement for overt homosexuality. Parents believed everything they were being told, so things had to change for the Guardian of Gotham City, a shift in his crusade for justice, you could say. So from fighting the scum and villainy in the squalid alleyways of night-shrouded Gotham, Batman and Robin spread their wings and took flight, quite literally, into the daylight and outer space in their quest for the greater good.

But first something had to be done about the mutterings of their...relationship. It was at this point that we were first introduced to the extended Bat family. First among these was Kathy Kane aka Batwoman, who fought alongside the Dynamic Duo, all the while carrying a romantic torch for our tall, dark leading man. Hot on her heels came Batgirl, (this version had no connection to Commissioner Gordon at this point,) so both Batman and his ward had some eye candy to goggle at. With two gals for our all American heroes to drool over, you can't get more wholesome than that.

Rounding out our Bat-clan was Ace the Bat-Hound, who had single handily (or paw-ily) deduced Bruce and Dick's secret identities, and last but not least, Bat-Mite, the interdimensional sprite who was as much of a magical pain to Batman as Mr Mxyzptlk was to Superman.

All this should have been more than enough to assuage a crusader like Wertham, right? It's just too bad they didn't do something about the male chauvinism Batman showed toward Batwoman. The condescension he aimed at his fellow crime fighter was at times appalling. But then I guess that around that time it was only right that women knew their place...

Batman's foray into the fifties is often derided and considered by many to be the lowest ebb of his career, and while some of the dafter sci-fi aspects of the storylines can be forgiven, (this was the time of Sputnik and the start of the space race between the U.S. and Russia,) there were some fine tales to come out of this decade.

Although both characters had been around for over ten years, apart from appearing on comic covers to boost war bonds in the forties, it wasn't until 1952 that Batman and Superman teamed up properly for the first time. This led to a revamp of World's Finest Comics which saw the team up happen on a regular basis. And so popular was this that from it sprang the idea of the Justice League of America at a later date.

The standout story for me during this time of bland day glow tales was when it was revealed that Bruce Wayne was not the first Batman in Gotham; rather it was his father Thomas who had donned the cowl long before his son. For those of you out there who have yet to read this gem, I urge you to seek it out for yourself. It's a story from Bat-history that has had ramifications right up to the present day.

Another tale from this time which stands out is to be found in Detective Comics, issue168, titled "The Man behind the Red Hood!" This story would later become the foundation stone to the origin of the Dark Knight's arch nemesis, the Joker. This tale would be fully fleshed out in the eighties by Alan Moore and Brian Bolland's seminal graphic novel, The Killing Joke.

As with every decade we comic readers have to take the good with the bad, but the fifties ran the whole gamut of mixed mediocrity, with a few jewels like the ones briefly mentioned, shining amongst the dreck that was being churned out, in what I now believe to be a deliberate tactic just to keep Batman from being cancelled altogether. So we can forgive gaudy stories where Batman had to wear a different coloured costume every night and thus labelled "The Rainbow Batman."

We endured him being turned into a human fish, witnessed the Bat Signal being projected onto the face of the moon, and lastly shuddered at the monstrosity that was "Mogo the Bat-Ape!" As odd as all these stories were, in their own way they were entertaining. There's a saying that things have to get worse before they get better, and indeed the 1950's was the turning point for Batman and the comic industry as a whole, and we should thank our lucky stars that some of our most beloved characters weren't cancelled completely.

Batman and Robin, among others endured. And just around the corner was the swinging sixties and the birth of pop culture, where we would see the Dynamic Duo's popularity hit new heights.

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BATMAN IN THE 1960's

For Batman, the 1960s was a decade of churn. New directions were regularly adopted by publishers DC Comics before having to be abandoned due to commercial exigencies, some totally unexpected. In that one ten-year period, the Caped Crusader lurched between ridiculous and sublime – and the brutal fact is that it was at his most absurd that he achieved the greatest success.

The Batman character proceeded in the first half of the Sixties pretty much as it had in the second half of the 1950s. From approximately the dawn of rock 'n' roll to roughly the Beatles' first appearance on The Ed Sullivan Show, Batman was as unhip and cheesy as Pat Boone. The Batman Universe was increasingly and incongruously science-fiction oriented. It was also populated by an ever-expanding Batman family that included Ace the Bat-Hound, Batwoman (not to be confused with Bat-Girl), Bat-Girl (a child character not be confused with the later, adult and unhyphenated, Batgirl) and Bat-Mite (an imp Batman devotee not to be confused with anything less than risible). The writers devised stories that lived down to this freakshow via the likes of robots, space creatures and mad scientists. Batman himself often wasn't Batman but was forced to undergo the indignity of metamorphoses, transformed via villainy or accident into such things as a skyscraper-sized giant, an antennae-headed green alien and Bat-Baby.

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These days, such Silver Age zaniness is precisely what motivates adults to salivatingly compile wants lists for the period, but at the time even young readers were clearly sufficiently sophisticated to understand that novelty should not be commonplace. When in 1964 DC appointed Julius Schwartz editor of its Batman line it was with the specific purpose of arresting a steep decline in sales.

"Introducing a 'new look' Batman and Robin" declared the front cover of Detective Comics #327, cover-dated May 1964. The hero appeared sleek and fresh, symbolised by the yellow oval now resident behind the bat symbol on his chest. Robin, meanwhile, was suddenly no longer a dutiful boy but a teenager, with all the chippiness that implied. Batman himself now had an edge fitting his life-mission of avenging the slaying of his parents: at one point in the story, he threatened a villain with his own confiscated gun.

The following month's Batman (#164) saw the unveiling of a new set of wheels. "The original Batmobile has had its day," Bruce Wayne explained to Dick Grayson. "The trend now is toward sports cars – small, manoeuvrable jobs." The same comic saw a new-look, high-tech Batcave and the introduction of a hotline to Commissioner Gordon. More changes were being rung in over in Detective Comics the same month. Alfred was killed off and replaced by Dick's Aunt Harriet, a sop to those who had long complained about the alleged homosexual undertones to a domestic set-up involving no females. Schwartz had to reverse the butler's demise when told that a forthcoming Batman TV series would feature the character, but other modifications took. The members of the bat family were treated like most embarrassing relatives are by never being mentioned, science fiction stories were banned and a semblance of noir was engendered by setting stories wherever practical at night. Batman's visuals became largely the preserve of Carmine Infantino. Although Batman's rinky-dink ears and the cast's toothpaste smiles now appear slightly antediluvian, the artist also brought a musculature and realism to the character that then seemed very modern.

And then it was all undone. The villain who tore asunder Schwartz's well-laid plans was not the Joker, the Riddler or Catwoman, but the aforementioned ABC television series. The Batman show that ran between January 1966 and March 1968 was in large part a spoof of the 1943 Batman serial starring Lewis Wilson, particularly its contrived cliff-hangers and foghorn-voiced narration. Overlaid on that was Adam West's deadpan portrayal of Batman as the only man in the world who didn't know how ridiculous he was, the exclamatory dialogue of Burt Ward's Robin, wholly unnecessary but utterly insistent sound-effect title cards, and a succession of cameos by famous faces who opened windows on the patently horizontal buildings the 'Dynamic Duo' were arduously scaling.

It was a genuinely good show, the pre-Schwartz Silver Age Batman comics brought to life but deploying a comedic approach that those publications hadn't possessed even though it was the only one appropriate to such wacko fare. Youngsters, though, didn't get the joke. Older kids thought it was a typically clueless adults' perspective on comics characters. Younger kids were entranced by the colour (it was one of the first programmes not shot in monochrome), the deus-ex-machina gadgets Batman pulled from his utility belt, the undeniably cool Batmobile and the Neal Hefti theme music (stirringly driving at start and end, dizzily

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swirling during transitions). When the show became a ratings smash, it meant that it became by default the only version of Batman that the majority of the populace knew. Schwartz and his colleagues felt obliged, therefore, to abandon the modernisation agenda and adopt the show's campy tone. Schwartz's feelings must have been mixed, to say the least, as Batman comic sales proceeded to double.

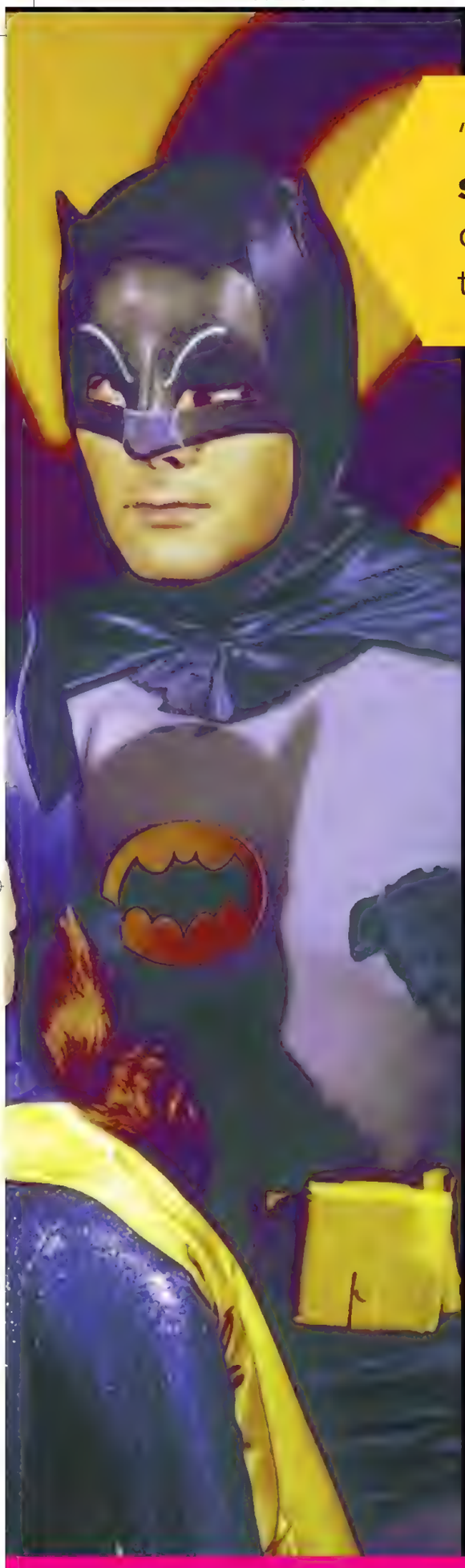
For those who measured success by metrics other than commerce, the Batman series was a disaster for both comics in general and DC in particular. The 'Marvel Age of Comics' was only just beginning to confer respectability on the picture-story medium. With DC already being made to look stale and juvenile via Stan Lee and co.'s layered stories and flawed heroes, the Batman show only underlined how far behind the times DC were perceived to be.

Eventually, after 120 episodes and a spin-off cinema release, the ABC show lost its popularity and was cancelled. Sales of DC's Batman titles plummeted accordingly, but the silver lining was that Schwartz was able to resume his reforms. The TV show's unhyphenated Batgirl, like Alfred, continued to be part of the Batman comics universe. In all other respects, though, the ABC Batman was dispensed with, and not with a heavy heart.

A quarter-century after he (officially, at least) created the character, Bob Kane had continued influencing Batman's direction, if mainly via the work of his ghost artists. Already infuriated by Infantino becoming the first Batman artist who didn't have to sign his work as "Bob Kane", in 1968 Kane dropped out of the picture after agreeing to sell his contract to the company. Ironically, the future belonged to a darker Batman, one much closer to Kane's original vision than anything consistently seen in recent years.

That future was primarily ushered in by two people. The first was artist Neal Adams. "That show was a satire, and a good one, but it wasn't really Batman," Adams reflects. Although Adams says Infantino is "still is one of the classic Batman artists," he also opines, "Carmine … was probably not the best artist for Batman. His work was a little bit stiff." He notes of Schwartz, "Julie was caught between a rock and a hard place: he was constrained by the licensing agreement that they had with Bob Kane and even some work that they had with Carmine Infantino. The same thing was not constraining Murray Boltinoff down the hallway."

Boltinoff was the editor of The Brave and the Bold, a bi-monthly which had latterly featured Batman and a different guest hero every issue. Although he first drew the Caped Crusader in the cheesy Batman-Superman team-up title World's Finest Comics, it was during his 1968/69 non-calendar year run on The Brave and the Bold that Adams transformed Batman. Exploiting the fact that DC bigwigs didn't seem to much care what occurred in this obscure byway of the Batman universe, he commenced to both revitalise the character and revolutionise comic layouts. Via Adams' pencil, Batman was more menacing than ever before, his ears jutting stiffly skywards and his cowl furling around him as if animated. "I'm not really a typical superhero artist," Adams says. "I draw quite a bit more realistically… People think that I drew longer ears but in fact I drew longer ears than Carmine Infantino, who drew very short ears. If you go back to Jerry



'When the show **became a ratings smash,** it meant that it became by default the only version of Batman that the majority of the populace knew'

Robinson and Bob Kane, the ears were actually quite long. I like the longer ears. It's an affectation that doesn't make any sense because somebody can grab him by the ears. The cape is like another character. I think of Batman as a guy who has come to terms with his cape and that it's like another person or a pet or a thing that's with him all the time and it's so fucking cool."

As for his outlandish panel-shapes, Adams offers, "I'm as much a designer as I am an artist." Having been "constrained" by the rigid three or four frames of his work on the syndicated Ben Casey daily newspaper strip, he says, "Now I could do this freewheeling page. I thought, 'Why don't I just go crazy? Why don't I design the page rather than the panels?' ... I went to Murray Boltinoff and said I would ask that I could change panel designs and move panels from one page to another and, if you don't mind, I'll set everything at night rather than in the daytime."

A minor Batman title The Brave and the Bold might have been, but Adams' exquisitely noir take on the character was not going unnoticed. Walking down a DC corridor one day, Adams found himself confronted by Schwartz, who demanded, "Adams, why am I getting all these letters saying that the only Batman at DC Comics is in Brave and Bold?" Adams: "I said, 'Julie, it's not just me that knows what Batman should be – it's every kid in the world. The only people that don't seem to know what Batman should be are people here at DC Comics.' And Julie said, 'You're drawing Batman for me.'"

Schwartz had already paved the way for change on the main Batman titles by swapping the Batcave and Wayne Manor for a Gotham City penthouse. Sending Dick Grayson off to college enabled the inconveniently non-gloomy Robin to be hived off to back-up strips. The real key to transformation, though, was assigning the appropriate writer. On The Brave and the Bold, Adams had drawn the scripts of Bob Haney. He was a respectable enough scribe, as was primary Batman scripter Frank Robbins, but said men's madcap approaches hardly put them on the same page as Adams about 'The Batman' (as he was now increasingly known). On Detective Comics, and subsequently Batman, Adams was teamed with Denny O'Neil. Though the latter was a Lovecraft and Poe fan who gravitated to gothic and eerie scenarios, he infused them with a thoughtfulness and grit that was the legacy of his journalism background.

The new pairing's first collaboration was in Detective Comics #395, cover-dated January 1970 but on sale several months previously. O'Neil was soon hailed as the writer who was returning Batman to his dark roots. "Everybody does their own version of Batman and none of them are wrong," O'Neil says. "I find it hard to read the Batman of the Fifties, but that was right for the times. There is no wrong way to do this stuff. There is the way that works or the way that doesn't work." "We certainly viewed him from a slightly more adult point of view," says Adams. "Denny wasn't interested really in writing superheroes – he was interested in writing, period. Here was an opportunity to write a semi-serious comic book."

For many, the dark and brooding Batman that closed out the Sixties reached its logical conclusion in the Eighties via the quasi-disturbed vision of the character proffered (as both writer and artist) by Frank Miller. Both Adams and O'Neil disagree with this viewpoint. "I like Frank, I like the work, but I think that other people had seen that Batman is not campy," says O'Neil. "At the core, it's a sad story and I don't think Frank or I are alone in that realisation."

Author: Sean Egan

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BATMAN IN THE 70's

RETURN TO THE SHADOWS

In the dying months of the swinging sixties and the dawning of a new decade stretching ahead, it became apparent to the powers that be in DC Comics that Batman didn't have what it took to sell comics any more. The true fans of Gotham's guardian were quite vocal in letting the Comics giant know how unhappy they were with the way Batman was being portrayed, and in fact had been portrayed for some years now.

The editors in charge of the Batman comics decided to relent and listen to what the fans were telling them. What was needed was a fundamental return to the grassroots of what made Batman so readable in the first place. The problem was that with the popularity of the Batman television show that ran in the mid to late sixties, and starred Adam West as the titular hero, the comic version of the Batman reflected the campiness the show was famous for.

But while the TV show was a smash hit with both the kids and their parents alike, there's only so many times before the telling of the same joke over and over becomes as smelly as one of the Penguin's herrings. Even with the introduction of Yvonne Craig's Batgirl in the third season, which, let's face it was more for the dads than the kids, it couldn't stop the rot, and the third season turned out to be the swan song, with Bruce and Dick sliding down the Batpoles for the last time.

As the show slumped and died, so did comic sales. Something had to be done before the four-colour Batman went the same way of the show. The last fifteen years had been hard on Bruce Wayne and his nocturnal alter ego. Psychologist Frederic Wertham's destructive book on the degenerative ramifications on American kids who read comics put an end to a lot of characters in the comic industry, and Batman and Robin were lucky to survive the industry cull in one piece.

The Comics Code Authority was created to govern the contents of what the kids would read from then on, and DC Comics bent the knee and towed the line. Hence the Dynamic Duo became even more kid friendly than ever before. And so it was that for the best part of the next decade

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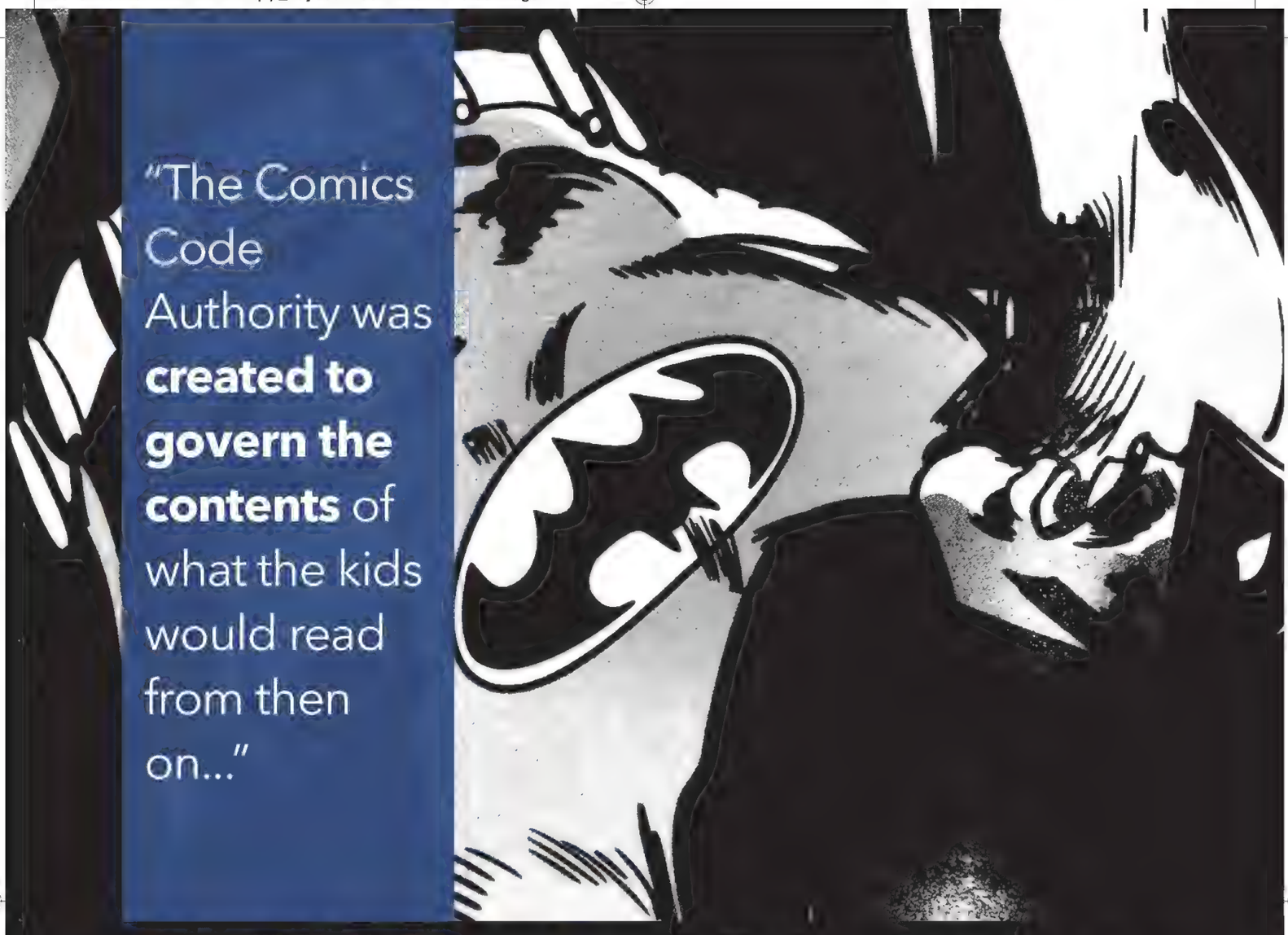

"The Comics Code Authority was **created to govern the contents** of what the kids would read from then on..."

or so, the Denizens of evildoers could be found sauntering into Gotham Police Headquarters at high noon rather than through the tenth floor window of Commissioner Gordon's office during a rain drenched witching hour.

You get the idea...

The editor of Batman at the time, one Julius Schwartz, needed new blood on the team, but his list of writers and artists whom he thought could steer the comics in a new direction was

extremely short. But he'd already been approached earlier by a budding young artist by the name of Neal Adams. In short, Adams thought he had what it took to make Batman scary again, but Schwartz turned him away. Still convinced of his own talents, Adams then approached the editor of a sister comic to the two main Batman titles to give him a shot at the title.

And so before long Adams was ensconced behind his drawing board and churning out the art for the comic titled The Brave and the Bold. It didn't take too long for the readers to cotton on to how good this title was, and they started bombarding DC with letters stating that this was the Batman they'd been waiting for. Soon, Brave and the Bold was outselling both Batman and Detective Comics. Schwartz was quick to realise his mistake at dismissing the artist and offered him the gig on Detective.

Now all Schwartz needed was an equally talented writer to inject a different approach to the monthly adventures. Writer Denny O'Neill was already at the DC camp after a tenure working for Marvel. Schwartz approached him with the idea of making Batman popular again. O'Neill's previous work on Wonder Woman had shown him to be a writer who liked to upset the status quo of his characters.

O'Neill wasted no time and trawled his way back through the lengthy history of the Batman comics to learn what had made this character so popular for so long, and to understand what had fundamentally gone wrong with a character that at one time had been so endearing to so many fans. As O'Neill toiled away to write Batman and make it work again, it was apparent to all why Neal Adam's art had become so popular in such a relatively short amount of time.

Adam's pencils gave the reader a Batman he, or indeed she, had never seen before. This Batman seemed more...real. There was no other word for it. He was lithe, athletic and powerful looking, but not bulky as he had often been drawn in the past. Batman was now more streamlined, sculpted with heightened realism, and as for the cape, well that seemed to have a life of its own. The cowl was more expressive, complete with brooding brow, and the ears were lengthened, giving a more angular and menacing look. Combine all that with Bruce Wayne's square jawline and this gave you a Batman you wouldn't want to meet up a darkened alley, which I guess was really the whole point to begin with.

Even the yellow oval on Batman's chest had been given a makeover, the bat insignia was now sharper and more defined, stretched across a muscular chest that strained the fabric of the Bat suit. In short, Batman the Caped Crusader had become the Dark Knight Detective, a living shadow that lurked in Gotham's darkest recesses, an urban legend that criminals would once more fear.

In the meantime, O'Neill had realised what was broken and set out to fix it and the first team up between writer and artist is hailed by many to be the start of the Bronze Age

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in comicdom. Between them, they paired back all the excessive Bat-baggage. Dick Grayson going to college seemingly ended the team of the Dynamic Duo, allowing Batman to prowl the nights on solo missions, as he had when first created way back in 1939.

So, gone was Wayne Manor, and the Batcave was mothballed, along with the assorted Bat-gadgets and vehicles. Bruce Wayne and his trusty butler Alfred Pennyworth relocated to the plush penthouse atop the Wayne Foundation Building in the heart of Gotham City, to be closer to the criminal element that lurked there.

The mantra was an almost "less is more," kind of approach, boiling Bruce Wayne down to his bare essence, which is him fighting his one man war against crime and injustice. But it was also a way of distancing the comics from the television show and all the camp that had gone before, where there was a Bat gadget to be had for every occasion, (anti-shark repellent, anyone?)

It was also a bold step in taking Batman out of his beloved Gotham City, and for the first time Batman got to stretch his wings. No longer was he confined to the concrete canyons of Gotham. Using his everyday identity of Bruce Wayne, billionaire playboy philanthropist, the Dark Knight Detective set his sights on crime further afield than the city he'd sworn to protect. Batman became a global adventurer. New locations would bring with it new foes.

As well as the excessive baggage being jettisoned, so too was the recurring rogues gallery of Joker, Penguin, Catwoman and Riddler. If Batman was to be taken seriously again, the threat level needed to be raised, and even though the Joker would eventually be recognized as Batman's arch nemesis, at this point in his history, the villain had been so watered down, he'd become a bit of a... joke. O'Neill wanted everyone to forget all about Caesar Romero's moustache crudely hidden beneath white face paint and give Batman a criminal that would really test his mettle.

O'Neill and Adams' first collaboration together took place in Detective Comics #395, and the story was titled "The Secret of the Waiting Graves." Here we find Bruce Wayne travelling to Mexico to attend a party being thrown by a rich family, who turn out to be a pair of immortal beings hell-bent on infecting the rest of the human race with an epidemic that will invoke madness and death.

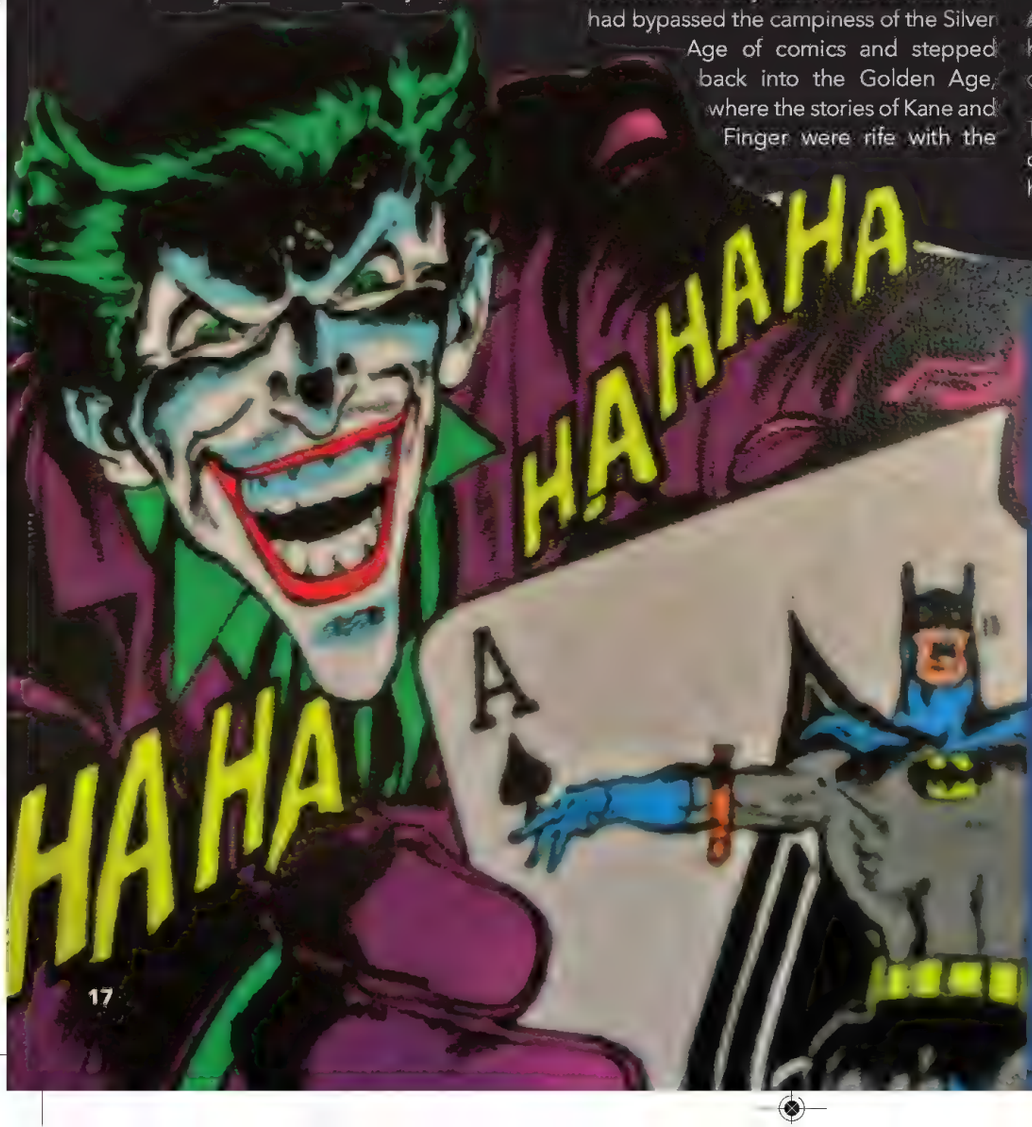
And from this very issue, it was as if Batman had bypassed the campiness of the Silver Age of comics and stepped back into the Golden Age, where the stories of Kane and Finger were rife with the supernatural and things not of this world. The Batman had become an elemental creature of the night again. "Criminals are a superstitious and cowardly lot..." Bruce Wayne had quoted when devising the identity of a shadow that would instill fear in their very souls. O'Neill knew that going back to what made the Dark Knight tick was the one thing that would make him resonate with the readers again. And how right he was.

After several stories involving spooks and things that went bump in the night, Batman would confront an adversary that would become a twisted mirror image of him. Julius Schwartz had asked writer and artist Frank Robbins to come up with something unexpected for issue 400 of Detective Comics.

Drawn by Adams, avid readers were introduced to Doctor Kirk Langstrom, who through scientific jiggery pokery concocts a way to give him the sonar capabilities of a bat. But as with all things that man isn't supposed to dabble in, the procedure backfires, transforming Langstrom into a hideous Man-Bat!

Here was a Jekyll & Hyde character the reader couldn't help sympathise with, and Batman had to rely on more than his fists to find a way to beat this tragic character. At long last, Batman was finally living up to his reputation as the world's greatest detective.

Towards the end of 1970 Batman ran afoul of the League of Assassins, which at first hinted at an even bigger threat waiting in the wings for the cowled crime fighter.



"Issue 251 is widely regarded as one of the **greatest Joker stories ever told...**"

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And so Batman met Ra's Al Ghul in 1971in issue #232 of Batman. He was an eco-terrorist as it eventually turned out, though he was considering Batman and testing him to see if he was a worthy successor, not only to run his vast organization, but also also worthy for the hand of his beautiful daughter Talia. Batman eventually discovered the truth about Ra's and defeated him, after one of the most spectacular sword fights ever drawn in comics.

It was during this time that Bruce Wayne adopted a third identity, that of "Matches Malone," a low level gangster that allows Batman greater access to information in the criminal underworld. And once both Ra's and Talia were temporarily on ice, the Batman stories became rather one shot, standalone tales, with the Dark Knight solving crimes but not coming up against costumed villains.

Unless you take the Spook into account. This turned out to be a rather annoying thorn in Batman's utility belt that popped up now and again to throw a spanner in the works. He was a new villain that didn't quite live up to expectations, and he eventually fizzled out. The stories were in danger of becoming mediocre again. Batman, for want of a better word, felt incomplete somehow.

And then the Joker returned, along with O'Neill and Adams who had both been on brief hiatus, bringing with them a darker version of the Clown Prince of Crime in issue #251 of Batman. In "Joker's Five Way Revenge," Joker returned with a bang. Gone was the buffoonery associated with the old days. Adams pencils depicted Joker as gaunt and angular, with a slightly oversized chin to accentuate the grin, another touch of heightened realism. O'Neill, as he had done with Bruce Wayne, went back to the Joker's roots, giving him a psychotic edge once more, and an almost obsessive fascination for the Batman.

Issue 251 is widely regarded as one of the greatest Joker stories ever told, and the turning point in the dichotomous relationship of the two adversaries who most epitomize good versus evil. Ying and yang, two sides of the same coin, it's hard to think of one without the other, and so it has been form this issue forward.

Realising there was life in the old dogs yet; the old rogue's gallery was reintroduced into the Batman canon, though written in an updated standard like the Joker, but it has to be said, with lesser success. Batman even got to meet the Shadow in this decade, and it's well documented that Bob Kane was heavily influenced by this pulp character of the thirties when creating Batman.

But all things can't last, and when the stories were beginning to flounder, Archie Goodwin took over the editing chores on Detective, bringing with him penciller Jim Aparo, who, like Adams had cut his teeth on Batman drawing Brave and the Bold. But DC, not happy with the sales, made Detective a bi-monthly book, though made it a whopping one hundred pages in length with back to back Batman tales.

And one cannot recall Batman's journey through the 70's without mentioning in dispatches another iconic stablemate introduced into the Batman canon, one that is as synonymous with his world as much as Gotham City itself. I am of course referring to Arkham Asylum. Batman #258 brings us the establishment that goes with Batman like death and taxes, and is an institute that is probably more responsible for creating and nurturing Batman's nefarious baddies than just about anything else.

The 1970's turned out to be the saving grace of Batman, and while not all the stories were masterpieces, it did put the Dark Knight back in the shadows where he well and truly belongs. But hark, a new decade approaches, the 1980's is just around the corner, and with it comes a new creative name that will forever establish Batman as a creature of the night...Miller.

Author: Stephen Jewell | **Twitter:** @stephenjewell | **Stephen writes for SFX, Total Film & the Megazine**

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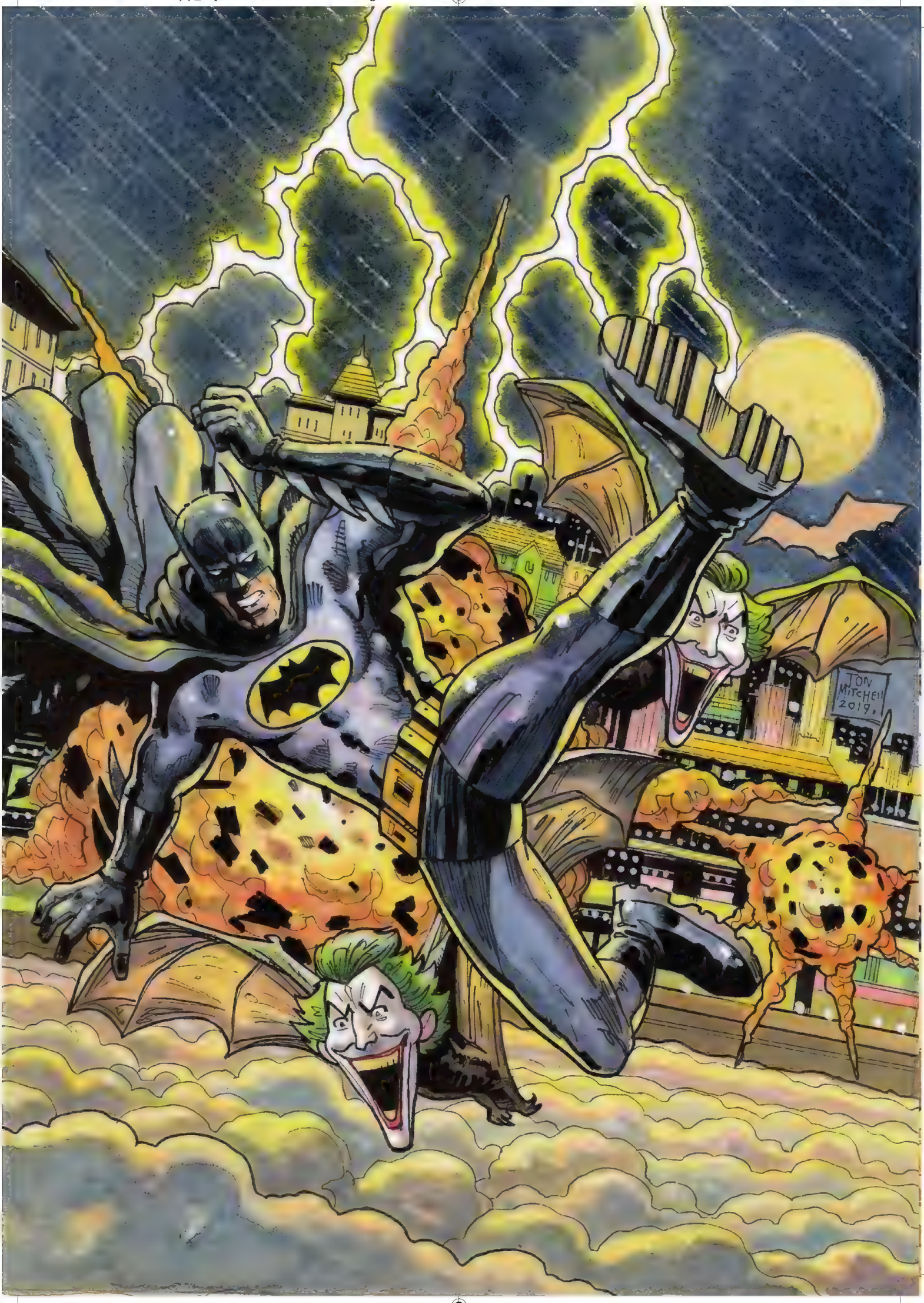

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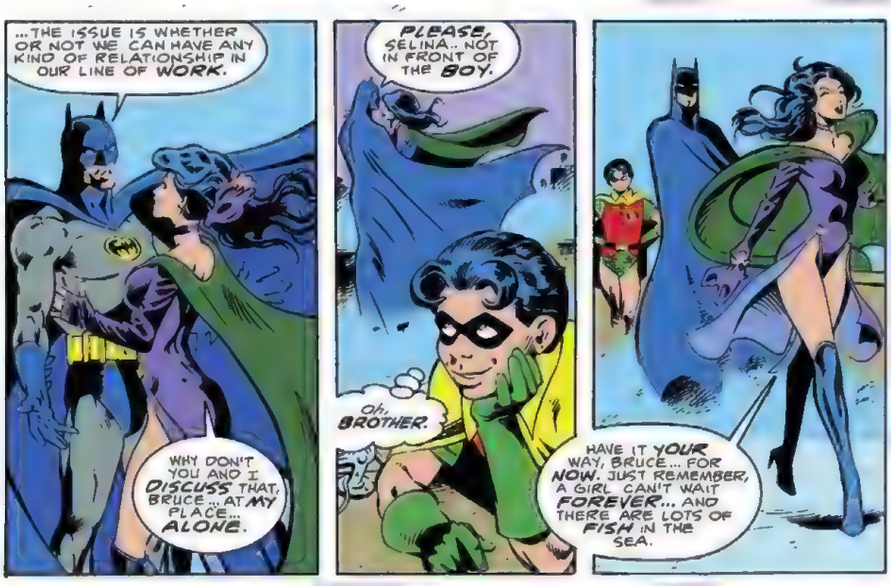
THE DARK KNIGHT DELIGHTS

THE BATMAN & DETECTIVE COMICS OF MIKE W. BARR & ALAN DAVIS.

- FIVE PERFECT ISSUES.
- ONE BIG ANNIVERSARY ISSUE.
- AND A SHARP LEFT-TURN INTO THE RIDICULOUS.

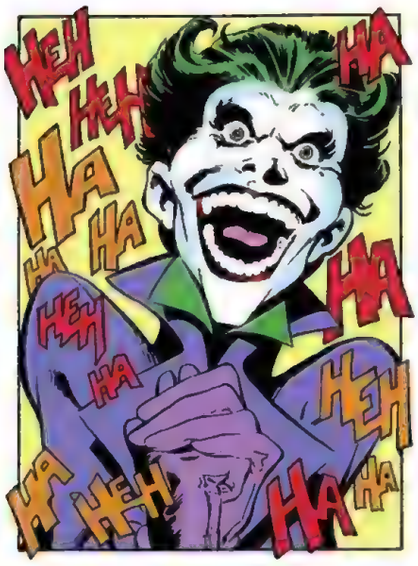

...THE ISSUE IS WHETHER OR NOT WE CAN HAVE ANY KIND OF RELATIONSHIP IN OUR LINE OF WORK.
WHY DON'T YOU AND I DISCUSS THAT, BRUCE... AT MY PLACE... ALONE.
PLEASE, SELINA... NOT IN FRONT OF THE BOY.
OH, BROTHER.
HAVE IT YOUR WAY, BRUCE... FOR NOW. JUST REMEMBER, A GIRL CAN'T WAIT FOREVER... AND THERE ARE LOTS OF FISH IN THE SEA.

Once upon a time, for six glorious issues of Detective Comics back in 1986/87, writer Mike W. Barr and artist Alan Davis created something quite extraordinary with the Dark Knight detective. They managed to make Batman FUN in a time when comics in general, and Batman in particular, were anything but. The run might have been short and sweet, and what came after by Barr and Davis was, by turns, bizarre, ridiculous, and pretty dull, but those few issues were just the perfect examples of bright, colourful, fabulous superhero comics.

This short run of Detective Comics, from issue 569-575, came out in the white heat of possibilities for the DC Universe post Crisis on Infinite Earths, where everything was possible, everything was new. But new, it seemed, meant dark. Dark Knight Returns, Batman: Year One, and Watchmen had transformed superheroes into something grim and gritty, and no-one was grimmer or grittier than Batman. And then along came the pure, unadulterated fun of Barr and Davis' Detective Comics.

In the face of all this deconstructionist darkness, **here was a bright, colourful, playful comic**, embracing all the classic, and often ridiculous, elements of Batman's history.

With Detective Comics, both Barr and Davis found the perfect tone and style to bring the best from themselves and from Batman. Barr's writing found fresh life, full of playfulness, concentrating on one or two-part tales, packing everything into a perfect Batman concentrate, full of great moments, dense storytelling given space and lightness through Davis' artwork. And Davis' art was a perfect fit, his classical lines supplemented beautifully by Paul Neary's inking and Adrienne Roy's colours. You need only look at the art to



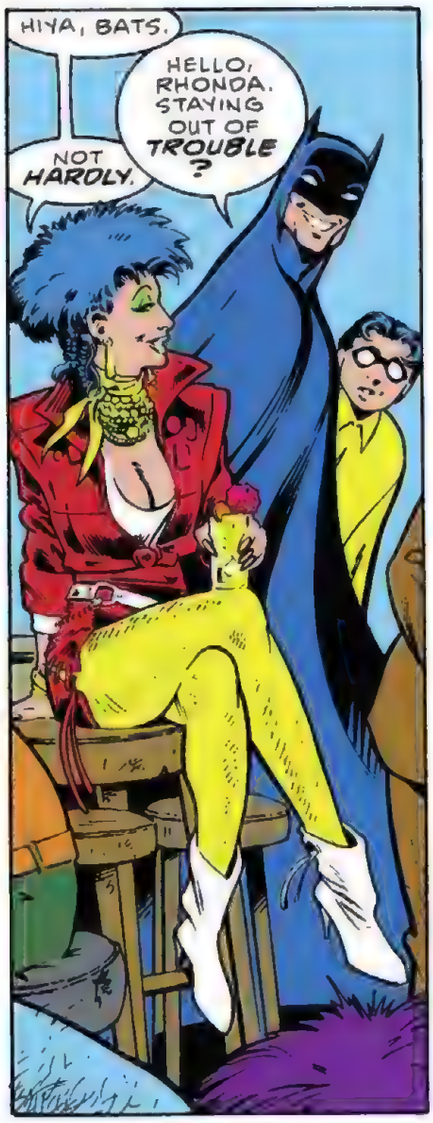
realise that this is a technicolour Batman, with all concerned delighting in bringing the fun back to this not so dark Knight.

Everything was played for high camp, whether that was Batman referring to Jason Todd's Robin as 'Chum', or Robin written as an excitable child, quick with the puns and the punches, even getting to do the classic fist punch from the TV show. And, as befits Detective Comics, it's also Batman the investigator, epitomised in the big 50th Anniversary story of issue 572, 'The Doomsday Book', illustrated by different artists for each chapter and featuring Slam Bradley, the Elongated Man, and even Sherlock Holmes, all tied up in one big sleuth-fest.

Another important aspect to the run was that it used a classic set of Bat-villains; Joker, Scarecrow, Mad Hatter, plus Catwoman trying to go straight(ish). But each has that same sense of the silly and madcap, more TV show than Nolan movies. Joker is no murderous psychopath, but drives around in the Jokermobile and leaves Bats sweet little clue cards to decipher his latest scheme. Scarecrow and Mad Hatter show hints of madness, but it's restrained, filtered through the bright light of their portrayal here. And in Catwoman, we not only have a semi-reformed criminal but a flirty and teasing love interest, glamorous, exciting, and dangerous.

Frankly, the final issue of Barr and Davis' Detective should have been 574. That would have been a lovely way to go out, with a retold origin tale, Robin in dire peril, and Batman's resolve questioned before everything works out all for the best. Yes, that would have been a lovely way to go out, short and sweet, the very definition of quality over quantity.

But, sadly, it ended with Detective Comics 575, the first part of Batman: Year Two. It's a ridiculous tale, retconning history with the return of the Reaper, a killer vigilante, complete with a pair of gun/scythe gauntlets, who kept Gotham crime free 20 years before Batman. The retcon was silly enough, but the ridiculousness comes with



This is a very old story as Batman stories go. It happened in the days when The Dark Knight had just taken under his wing a young boy, dressed in red, yellow and green.
At first, they seemed an incongruous pairing. The Knight seldom spoke, standing like a pillar of muscled darkness, while the boy was seldom still, darting about like a ray of laughing sunshine.
However, it soon became obvious that some unbreakable bond held the two, despite their differences. Both had looked upon the face of tragedy, and been forever changed.
The Knight, who had previously walked alone, now became a father, a big brother, a teacher. The boy, whose world had been turned upside-down, became a son, a little brother, a pupil.
Each was determined that no one else would suffer as he had suffered. Each would cheerfully give his life for the other.
And so the legend of The Dark Knight and the Boy Wonder grew... but just as there are always legends, so there will always be those who need to destroy them...

"Batman's decision, after **a vicious beating from a man a good 20 years his senior,** to take up arms against the Reaper".

Batman's decision, after a vicious beating from a man a good 20 years his senior, to take up arms against the Reaper. But, not just any gun. Oh no, he's going to use the gun that killed his parents. The only thing more ridiculous would be to have Batman team up with Joe Chill, the man who murdered his mom and dad with that very gun. Which, yes, Barr promptly went ahead and did, just one issue later.

By then, Davis had quit, dissatisfied with DC editorial and tempted by Chris Claremont, X-Men, and Excalibur at Marvel. Allegedly, everything came to a head when Davis was told to redraw the Mauser pistol, on issue 375's cover and final page, to match the gun in Year One, a gun referenced as a Mauser in Barr's script. But Davis, being a consummate pro and super fast, had already submitted the complete issue before Year One was published. Davis asked to have Mazzucchelli redraw his gun. DC refused, Davis refused to redraw anything, Dick Giordano altered Davis' artwork, and Davis quit, to be replaced by a young Todd McFarlane. Barr lasted a few more issues, before he was replaced by John Wagner and Alan Grant, alongside artist Norm Breyfogle with Detective Comics 584.

Barr and Davis would return to Batman a couple of times, firstly in 1991's Batman: Full Circle, featuring Joe Chill's son as a resurrected Reaper. This was just more of the same we'd seen in Year

BAT MAN
HE'S BACK! THE PHARAOH OF PHOBIAS, THE DUKE OF DREAD, THE SCARECROW IS BACK TO STRIKE TERROR INTO THE HEARTS OF GOTHAM CITY. THIS TIME BY OFFERING...
FEAR FOR $ALE
FEAR
MIKE W BARR WRITER
ALAN DAVIS and PAUL NEARY ARTISTS
JOHN WORKMAN Letterer
ADRIENNE ROY Colorist
DENNY O'NEIL Editor

Celebrating the proud 50th Anniversary of
Detective COMICS
FROM A CENTURY PAST, FROM THE MIND OF THE MOST EVIL GENIUS MEN HAVE EVER KNOWN, COMES A THREAT THAT CAN BE SOLVED ONLY BY THE GREATEST SLEUTHS OF OUR TIME -- AND THE GREATEST SLEUTH OF ALL TIME
the doomsday book
BY MIKE W BARR
COLORED BY ADRIENNE ROY
EDITED BY DENNY O'NEIL

Two, with none of the joyful spirit of Detective Comics. Barr's story was too thin for the length of the book, and Davis' artwork looked darker, with a muddy colouring scheme, all the brightness of those Detective issues long gone. The final collaboration was a sweet call-back and coda to Detective Comics, the b&w back-up in Gotham Knights issue 25 in 2002, 'Last Call at McSurley's', featuring the same villains dive-bar we'd seen in Detective.

In the final analysis, this run of Detective Comics still stands as a wonderful beacon of light amongst the ever-darkening history of The Dark Knight. We had a creative team who understood all the fun, pop possibilities of Batman and delivered a set of near perfect stories.

For just that little while, amid the darkness, Batman was just plain FUN.

ALAN DAVIS AND MIKE W. BARR'S COMPLETE BATMAN

Written by Mike W. Barr, drawn by Alan Davis

Detective Comics issues 569-575 (1986-1987)

(Paul Neary – inks, Adrienne Roy – colours. Additional art in issue 572; Eufronio Reyes Cruz, Terry Beatty, Carmine Infantino, Dick Giordano, Al Vey)

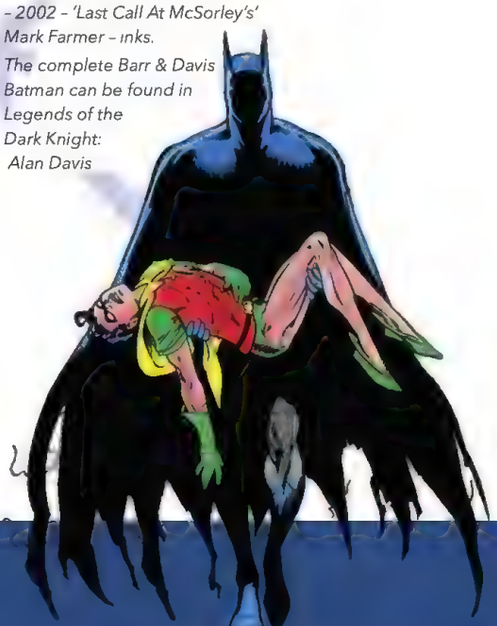
Batman: Full Circle - 1991

Mark Farmer – inks, Tom Ziuko - colours

Batman: Gotham Knights #25 – 2002 – 'Last Call At McSorley's'

Mark Farmer – inks.

The complete Barr & Davis Batman can be found in Legends of the Dark Knight: Alan Davis



Author: Richard Bruton | **Twitter:**@richardbruton

BATMAN V'S THE WORLD!

"I can't stand heroes who snivel and whine," Frank Miller told the comics press before unleashing his own take on Batman upon the world - and after changing perceptions of cheesy comic book superheroes irrevocably, the world was left in no doubt he meant it.

Some had heard the distant rumble of thunder long before the weather finally broke. The ground breaking anthology 'RAW', launched by Art Spiegelman and Francoise Mouly in 1980, was an oversized high quality alternative 'comix magazine' showcasing some of the very best talent from around the globe. Included as an attached supplement to the second issue was the opening chapter of Spiegelman's own 'Maus; A Survivor's Tale', a deeply personal account of his Jewish heritage and his father's experience in Poland under the Nazi regime. It would take a few years, but eventually people realised just what was happening here; raw emotions wrought from personal experience and real life atrocity brought to life in, of all things, a comic.

That very same year writer Alan Moore was making a breakthrough in UK comics, with scripts now appearing on a semi-regular basis in the pages of Marvel UK and IPC, quickly developing a reputation for stretching the boundaries of what could be achieved or even attempted. It would take a few years, but eventually people realised just what was happening here, an original talent with a huge belief in the form striving to show that it was possible, preferable even, to tell any number of interesting or valid stories in, of all things, a comic.

In the US Frank Miller had already made his move. Feted by industry insiders and fans alike as the Next Big Thing, he'd broken through in 1979, first as artist then writer/artist on ailing, bi-monthly, b-list Marvel superhero title Daredevil. Turning it into a critical and commercial hit, he followed that up at DC with Ronin, a deeply personal work incorporating elements of sci-fi, demonology and ancient samurai folklore. Creating Ronin had been a liberating experience, enabling him to change from doing things the way he'd been taught (on the monthly treadmill) to the way he believed they could and should be done. At a remarkably young age he was outgrowing the confines of the industry and his reputation was opening doors. Ronin was an important step and he'd learnt a lot in the process, about packaging and production, paper quality and colouring. He'd conceived, written, penciled, inked, edited, designed and supervised the whole thing from beginning to end. Then, with his Ronin duties concluding around mid/late 1984, just as word of mouth continued to spread about the emerging talent of Moore and the sheer genius of Spiegelman, Miller seemed to disappear. For what seemed like an eternity there was silence.

It's as if he went…underground.

It's always too hot down here in the Underground. The shirt clings to your back and there's that clammy feel on the back of your neck. As the platform fills up quickly and the crowd all jostle for position there's the sudden blast of hot air that rushes up through the tunnel, followed by the piercing whistle in your ear as the train rattles through, screeching to a halt. There's the crazed rush to get on, a silent race with strangers, laying claim any available seat. Those left standing hover, loiter, cursing under their breath. No one talks to anyone. Everyone avoids eye contact. There's the occasional sideways glance as people check that everyone in their nearby vicinity doesn't look too…unsavoury.

You're grateful you've made it to a seat. It's so busy up there/down here. Now you can relax a bit, head back home. You've been to a shop, Forbidden Planet, in its last days in Denmark Street, then caught the tube at Tottenham Court Road, clutching your bag of newly purchased wares. You can't wait to check out this new Miller Batman thing. You grab the comic from the pile in your bag and turn to the beginning and start reading.

It's hard to make out what's going on. There's some guy in a racing car...he's going much too fast. He's going to crash. You can almost smell the burning rubber. Then you're in Gotham City, sweltering in 97-degree heat with no relief in sight. All the while your claustrophobic train screeches along the metal in the darkness, and another rush of hot air hits you again through the open carriage window. It's the perfect setting.

It's 1986 and comics are about to change. And it will have nothing whatsoever to do with the Howard the Duck movie.

RETURN

Frank Miller had not been idle. 1986 was not merely a turning point for the comics industry as a whole; for him personally it was a complete vindication of his whole working ethos, with a raft of high quality projects finally emerging into daylight and bearing fruit. Suddenly Miller was everywhere; as writer alongside artist Bill Sienkiewicz on the outstanding Elektra: Assassin limited series, again with Sienkiewicz on the Daredevil graphic novel Love and War, and the subject of a myriad of articles, previews and interviews in the fan press. He briefly returned to the Daredevil title alongside regular artist David Mazzucchelli, producing what's cited as one of the best superhero narratives ever in the seven-issue 'Born Again' storyline. There was even talk of an Elektra graphic novel in the works, both written and drawn by Miller.

Then there's the small matter of his Batman limited series, the origins of which lay in similar shared radical re-imaginings between himself and writer Steve Gerber (who had major changes in mind for Wonder Woman). Holed up in a hotel in New York over a period of three or four days, both men had spent the time talking non stop about comic books, in particular the 'holy trinity' of Batman, Superman and Wonder Woman. The idea of a kind of joint collaboration involving re-workings of all three never did see the light of day, but many of Miller's Batman ideas found their way into what would eventually become known as The Dark Knight Returns.

Of huge concern from the outset was just how much leeway DC were willing to give; Ronin had been Miller's baby entirely but this was completely different, he was asking to be let loose on one of DC's major properties and one of the biggest cultural icons on the planet. Discussing ideas on a plane with executive editor Dick Giordano, the comic book veteran effectively ended up acting as editor on the book, approving any changes and giving notes on how to strengthen ideas in certain areas.Miller had grand ambitions from the start and knew what he was up against. Beyond the cosy confines of an insular comics community, mention 'Batman' and everyone instantly thought of the fun, camp 1960's hit TV show staring Adam West. Beyond that, within the industry the original 'idea' behind the superhero, forged in the Depression-era 1930's, had been completely lost. Essentially a response to the overwhelming sense of powerlessness everyday people felt against the widespread corruption from gangsters, politicians and authority figures, the 'superhero' was forged from within a pervading sense of malice and impotence, as someone with the power to actually fight back. Much of this essence was lost in intervening decades, with Batman a prime example of a character whose original conception had become worn down by overfamiliarity, diluted by the unending demands of the monthly treadmill. He'd become a toy, a commodity, a self parody. Taken for granted, his storylines were filled with whatever trash element of pop culture seemed most apt at that particular time. There'd been worthy attempts before 1986 to take the character back to the more serious and darker roots that worked so well in the first place; writer Denny O'Neil and artist Neil Adams had rejuvenated the look and feel of the character before, later in the 1970's, writer Steve Englehart and artist Marshall Rogers produced a small run of storylines that earned many plaudits. Such takes were the exception rather than the rule however, despite the many great writers and artists who, together or separately, worked on the character over the years.

Although justifiably proud of his breakthrough on Daredevil, Miller believed Batman to be as good and pure a superhero you could possibly get. Much more of a public figure, known to millions, he was THE ideal vehicle for Millers own superhero 'opus'. Just as he did with Daredevil in Born Again, Miller would strip back the layers and accumulated detritus of the decades and look for what made the character tick. For Miller, what made Batman 'tick' seemed pretty obvious; 'Bruce Wayne' was nothing more than a host body for Batman, with Wayne essentially dying along with the brutal death of his parents when he was young. At that precise point the world stopped making sense, and The Batman was born, who would force that world to make sense again. Now an older man in his fifties, the idea that Wayne could 'retire' Batman due

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to mere old age is made a nonsense of. He can't deny what he truly is. In a Gotham gone to hell, a city he no longer understands, the need for order is stronger than ever. Batman must return, and if he needs to use unsavoury methods in this new brutal age, then so be it. Like something from out of a horror movie, Batman would scare his 'enemy', scar them, leave his mark. A hero acting like a villain. A hero doesn't necessarily have to be likeable, argued Miller, believing Batman to be the type of guy you'd want around when you were being mugged, if not someone you'd want to invite back for dinner afterwards.

Many of Miller's early interviews are peppered with references to American novelist and philosopher Ayn Rand, whose celebration of the Romantic ideal forged characters such as Howard Roark in her novel The Fountainhead. Full of uncompromising individuality, Rand's fictional heroes, (and real-life philosophy) also had a huge influence on artist Steve Ditko, whose character Mr A is a particular favourite of Miller's. Steadfastly incorruptible, meting out his own brand of uncompromising justice, seeing no middle ground between good and evil, right or wrong, Mr A's lofty ideals played into Miller's own thoughts on heroism. This would be storyline played out as morality tale, of a man somehow bigger or greater, capable of seeing how bad things were and able to do something about it. Indeed, Batman could be the perfect example of such a capable, stoic individual as, for Miller, the character 'only truly works if the world he inhabits is a malevolent and frightening place'.

That 'malevolent and frightening place' felt, until recently, only too real for Frank Miller himself.

Having moved to New York from his Maryland home to pursue a career in comics, his Daredevil work was produced as his life in the Big Apple unfolded, still yet to fully inform his work. In sharp contrast The Dark Knight Returns would come to pass following his relocation to the West Coast, with Gotham City based on his full real-life New York experience. The fear of violence felt on a daily basis living in New York had began to suffocate him, having himself been the victim of several muggings. Angry and paranoid, Miller would sit at home and stew watching Clint Eastwood movies, later talking of the frustration and anger he felt, the loss of power, the feelings of disgust that decent New Yorkers felt obliged to carry around extra cash in anticipation of bribing off muggers. For him Batman's hopeless, gone to hell Gotham was based on a future he could clearly see just around the corner, and if returning to his roots inherent in the pulps and characters such as 'the Shadow', his Batman would also have to adapt to the harsh realities of that present and near future. His methods would change. The Batmobile would become a thirty foot tank.

This was not going to be anything like Adam West.

TRIUMPHANT

A four-part limited series of 48 pages each was agreed on, with Miller later claiming to have cut around a hundred pages of scenes. A 'prestige format' (regular sized but with square binding, no adverts, utilising the same quality paper stock used on Ronin and considered the very best for the time) would, both he and DC believed, ensure the book would be taken beyond the realms of the regular monthly Batman titles and their younger readership. Miller would take on both script and pencilling himself, calling on people he knew he could rely on and trust for the other roles. Klaus Janson could ink Miller's pencils better than anyone, with the two men having built up a solid working bond over the years on Daredevil. Lynn Varley, who had worked with Miller on Ronin, gets credited with 'colours and visual effects'. (In an industry that produced its wares on the cheapest, most piss-poor paper imaginable, both Miller and Varley were keen to explore the possibilities of colouring). Varley's groundbreaking work would go on to have a profound impact on the finished look of each book. Miller's own sense of storytelling had also moved to another level, with his scripts honed, dark, yet full of wry social commentary and, often overlooked, not a small amount of humour.

His innovative use of continual TV reportage and commentary quickly immersed the reader into Gotham's skewered world, with his art had evolved into a 'blockier,' more scratchy style, enhanced as ever by Jansons gritty inking. Each book utilised a 16-panel page grid, making everything feel tight and claustrophobic. From the very first page you're right there at that racetrack and sharing that near death experience, before cutting to Gotham sweltering in the unbearable heat.

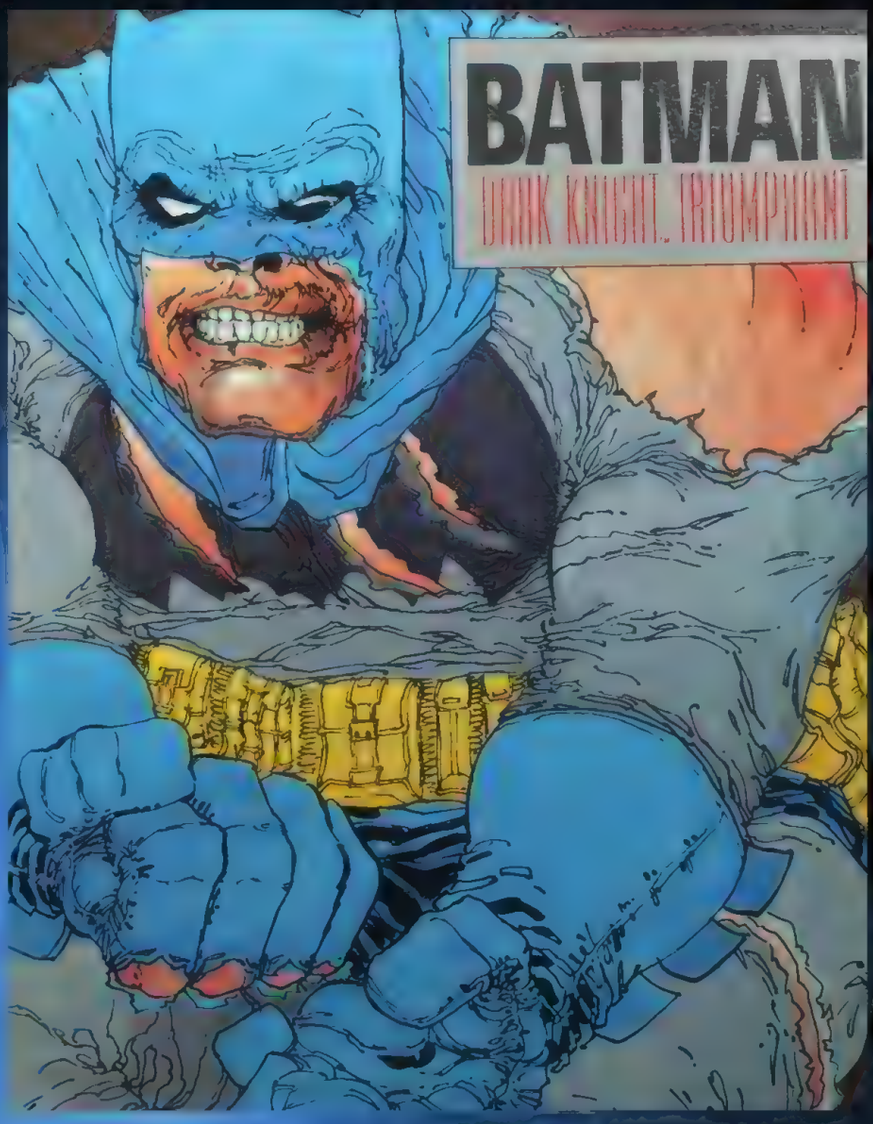
Now in his fifties and with Batman 'retired,' Bruce Wayne describes himself '...a dead man. Ten years dead' in '...a city thats given up'. All sense of public morality or social cohesion seems to have vanished, and all the time, inside him, the 'real' man chums, fighting to be freed. 'The fiercest survivor, the purest warrior' simply refuses to lie dormant while there is so much that remains to be done. Nothing now but an urban legend, The Batman remerges, laying siege on Gotham's underworld and conducting nothing short of 'holy war'('I smell their fear... and it is sweet'). He barks at a chasing police squad car to leave him to deal with criminals holed up inside an abandoned warehouse ('These men are MINE!') and while the older experienced officer knows best, the young rookie can hardly believe what he sees ('You've... crippled that man'). Batman's response ('He's young. He'll probably walk again') is the first sign that there's a new game changer in town.

One night of retribution is all it takes for the media to go into meltdown, arguing over the rights and wrongs of his actions on live tv. He's portrayed as saviour, vigilante, champion and madman. The 'Council of Mothers' petition the Mayor to issue a warrant for his arrest while the 'Victims Rights Task Force' petition to have his actions sanctioned. The Mayor sits on the fence, deliberating, as the world either condemns or endorses him. Later, when the new Police Commissioner is installed and issues a warrant for his arrest, he'll become a wanted man and hospitalise twelve police officers. He never once apologises for his actions. He'll take on the gangs, robbers, rapists, the police and the US government if need be, and while the media argues, discusses, dissects, and the villains make threats and the politicians duck and dive and pass the buck, it's him alone who acts. It's Batman versus the world; a terrorist superhero.

It's in the second book, The Dark Knight Triumphant, where Miller really examines the concept of the hero and how a sudden (re)emergence of a figure like Batman would affect the world. There's copycat attacks, violent retribution by victims and peaceful, quiet shopkeepers now armed and prepared to kill. Gotham is nothing short of being a war zone while the wider world itself seems on the brink of a nuclear war. This all seemed prescient even in the UK at a time of heightened 1980's Cold War tensions and 'Protect and Survive' public information films, as well as the increasing social tensions of a decade that began and ended with large scale inner-city rioting.

Batman realises that the reign of terror by the 'mutant gang' can only be stopped by targeting their ferocious leader, but in doing so he's initially beaten, his old ways and old age running up against a new breed of brutal, savage ferocity. He knows however that the only way forward is to beat the gang leader in hand to hand combat, in full view of the watching world. That he goes back for more isn't a testament to bravery per se, but simply that he knows there's no other option. Encapsulating this theme, the cover to the second book was Miller's own personal favourite, showcasing a Batman that 'just looks so beaten up, showing he can also take more than he can give - although he can give quite a bit'.

As well as successfully updating familiar characters such as Harvey Dent and the (outgoing) Commissioner Gordon, Miller would be particularly proud of his take on Robin. Thirteen year old Carrie Kelley turns her back on her 'normal' life and what



remained unseen but seemingly neglectful, stoner parents ('Hey, didn't we have a kid?') to assist Batman in his fight to restore order. Incoming Police Commissioner Ellen Yindel, whose first act is the issuing of that warrant for Batman's arrest, also quickly adds child abduction to the list of his crimes). A normal, teenage girl who we can [illegible] assisting with defining the slang and speech patterns of her and the many teenage gang members) she manages to save Batman's life more than once, and Miller was justifiably proprietorial of his take on the character, requesting that DC refrain from using her in any other books. In [illegible] one of the major interviews given to the fan press prior to launch, he ensured that it was Carrie alone that [illegible]. Yet as pleased as he would be with the character, Miller knew that in dealing with a cultural icon such as Batman there were two others he just couldn't ignore.

HUNTED

As the most prominent and popular bat villain of all, the Joker demanded a seat at Miller's banquet. The character had long made a successful transition from the cornball, slapstick antics of yesteryear to the more anarchic, sadistic persona well known today. Continually drawn into obsessive conflict with the Caped Crusader, he'd become the perfect foil to Batman's need for order, and Miller's own treatment sees both men stuck in their rigid dichotomy, order versus chaos, whilst somehow inexorably drawn together. Both see themselves reflected in the other, their personality disorders, their own forms of 'madness', the labels of 'monster'. Miller's outspoken psychiatrist character, Doctor Bartholomew Wolper, long blaming Batman for inspiring the heinous crimes of others, becomes just one of the 206 people slain as an incarcerated Joker makes his escape after appearing as a tv talk show guest. He goes on a further killing spree, safe in the knowledge that Batman will hunt him down, and beats up a defenceless Selina Kyle. The trail leads to the Gotham Funfair, where families enjoying a day out all unsuspectingly line up for further slaughter. The Joker revels in the hunt ('... no. I don't keep count...but you do, and I love you for it') yet even he seems taken aback by the ferocity of Batman's attack, who's not in the mood to be diverted by the Joker 'playing the old games' and hiding behind smoke bombs. There's grand irony in seeing the Joker flee, declaring Batman 'out...of your mind', both men heading for the denouement of their ages old battle in, of all places, the Tunnel of Love.

In making any definitive statement about 'superheroes' Miller also knew that Superman would need to show up. He's the figure that started it all and the reason all of this was possible in the first place. His very name defines the job description. The final book, The Dark Knight Falls, had been written in Miller's head for years, with the remainder of the storyline coming together over time to meet up with the finale. Superman has become a kind of federal agent, subservient to the Government, after earlier events have taught him to lay low and follow orders ('...every year they grow smaller. We must not remind them that giants walk the earth'). In complete contrast the new commotion in Gotham is due to a figure who could never lay low and follow orders. As things spiral out of control Superman is inevitably sent in to put a halt to proceedings. Both men have a sense all along that this moment would come and Batman, in particular, has prepared for it.

Things may have changed now, but at this early stage in his career it's fair to say that Miller really puts Superman through the wringer. There's something ridiculous about the way he's portrayed in those full page depictions, and the storyline seems to take great glee in him continually being beaten to a pulp. An interviewer would later feel the need to ask about this, following even further Man of Steel pummelling in Miller's Dark Knight sequel of 2001. The writer admitted there was an 'element of comeuppance' to proceedings, with Superman's very presence seeming to suggest an element of 'well, I can fly...and you can't' (His feelings towards the character seem to have mellowed over the years; the upcoming, much anticipated Superman: Year One may prove the point.) Superman implies benevolence as opposed to The Batman's malevolence, and Clark clearly seems to be holding back here, even if Batman clearly brings out the worst in him. When it comes to taking sides

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it's Batman who recruits an elderly Green Arrow, who relishes the chance to take a shot at 'the big blue schoolboy'. It's also Batman who seems in (almost) complete control of events throughout their historic battle, culminating on that filthy patch of street where his parents died.

FALLS

Comic fans love to argue about the minutiae, and even before Will Eisner's A Contract With God (1978) there were, apparently, 'graphic novels'. What is unarguable is that even a groundbreaking work such as Eisner's remained the sole preserve of an insular comics fandom, an impressive fish in a very small pond. It's only after 1986, as Watchmen unfolded, with the growing reputation of Maus, with Miller's take on Batman, then eventually all three going on to have the complete works collected in single volumes, that comics truly 'broke out' of that small pond to reach the mainstream. The wider public suddenly became aware that this 'kid's stuff' was… well, it was actually quite good, yet they still seemed to need a pass to allow themselves permission to guiltily indulge, to actually be seen with copies of these things on the coffee table or on the bookshelf. Welcome then, to the time when the comics finally 'grew up.'

Such a misconception is of course nonsense. People in countries such as France or Japan had long thought reading comics as a more than worthy adult pursuit. It's only in the likes of the US (where the superhero genre predominant) or the UK (with its rich heritage of perceived 'childish' humour titles) that a general public needed to be told 'it's OK…you can read this stuff now'. Once legitimised, Maus: A Survivor's Tale was free to win its Pulitzer Prize in 1992, Watchmen free to make Time Magazine's 100 Best Novels Ever list, and The Dark Knight Returns (as the collected work became labelled) free to redefine the rulebook for a whole genre and industry.

For better and for worse, comics have never recovered from these events. On the positive side, 1986 opened up opportunities for a huge variety of work, now available in the most accessible of places. Go into any reputable high street book store and you'll be greeted with its 'graphic novel' section, the best of which go beyond the usual Marvel/DC collections and feature work by many fine creators on almost any given subject. Even within the confines of those 'Big Two', Neil Gaiman's near contemporary Sandman is just one fine example of a work that probably never would have been conceived or allowed the time to bear fruit just a few years earlier.

The downside is that for far too long huge swathes of the industry tried to replicate past success. Lesser talents than Miller, Moore and Spiegelman repeated the same old riffs, with even more grittier, more earnest, more violent, more 'realistic' storylines becoming the norm. There were notable exceptions, of course there always are, but the superhero genre in particular suddenly seemed stuck hitting the same old notes. Frank Miller and Alan Moore even became the focus of some peoples ire, seen as being to blame for cursing the world with endless earnest, serious, dark superheroes. It's hardly their fault that for years an entire industry has offered little more but diluted versions of storylines they happened to write some thirty years previous.

When Tim Burton's Batman became the huge box office hit of 1989, pop culture went completely 'bat crazy'. Anyone around at the time might remember the blaze of publicity, the slew of merchandise, and almost everyone in the western world wearing a Batman chest emblem t-shirt. And the impetus behind this new huge cultural icon? If anyone missed joining the dots, Burton himself made it crystal clear, telling the Boston Globe the inspiration behind his take on the character lay in 'the new dark comics.' He'd read The Dark Knight Returns, and it was a Dark Knight, rather than a Caped Crusader, who opened the door to today's superhero box office bonanzas.

Cookery… Sport… British History …You glide past each section across the thickly carpeted floor, the refreshing breeze of the air conditioning stroking your face. From out of the silence, the impassivity, you're desperately seeking something different, something…visceral. You pass the classics you already know so well; Jane Eyre and Moby Dick and A Tale of Two Cities and War and Peace…past Science Fiction…Horror. Then it finally hits you. The Unknown. A whole section of…what? 'Graphic… Novels?' Strange looking tomes, colourful, with strange, large fonts on the spines, all lined up neatly on the oak panelled shelves. Maybe somewhere here is that something different that…but there's just so much of it! Where to begin? How to sort the wheat from the chaff?

You stop a passing member of staff and ask if they have any recommendations. He just stares blankly at the display for a while and says he's really not too sure, but he goes off to find a colleague who might be more versed in the different titles. She arrives, still munching on the remnants of a sandwich, but seems only too happy to help.

'How about this, nominated for the Booker Prize?' she splutters. Hmm…Sabrina… interesting, but maybe…oh whats this?

'Ah, Neil Gaiman', she replies, 'Sandman. Just wonderful. Or this…?'

She hands you something called 'The Complete Maus' and you quickly flick through it. It looks a bit…grim.

'Watchmen?'

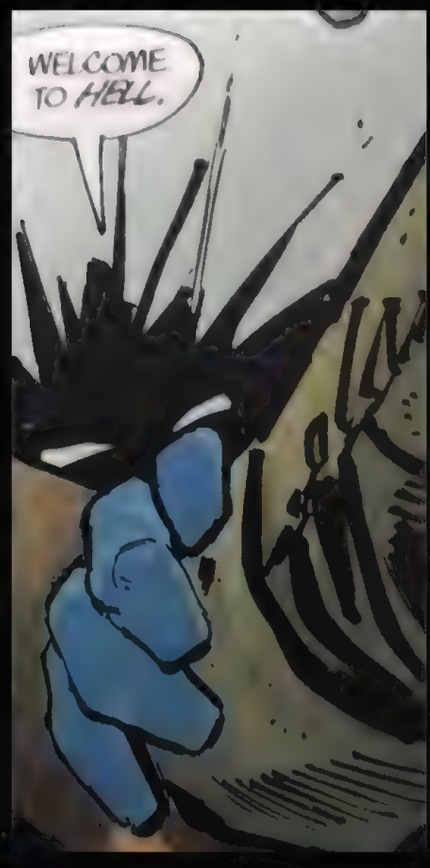
Ah, no, seen the film. Awful.

'Ah, then there's this?'

'Dark Knight Returns Thirtieth Anniversary Edition'. Ah…Batman! Yes. You know all about him of course. Christian Bale is really rather good. Let's give it a whirl.

Over the next few months, whenever you find a spare moment you trawl through your new purchase. It's…OK. You thought the idea of Batman being some old guy was a bit silly at first, but then Ben Affleck must be nearing fifty himself now, right? The artwork's a bit messy and it's hard to follow in places. You skip all the talky bits with the really big word balloons and get straight to all the action stuff. It's not bad. Nothing you wouldn't expect from a Batman yarn, but yeah…it's a good read, all told.

Good enough.



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My best Batman of the 90s It's all about the

BATMAN ADVENTURES

Oh yes, if you ask me, the greatest Batman run of all time is Batman Adventures (1992-1995) & the best Batman graphic novel ever is Batman Adventures: Mad Love (1994). You can take your Dark Knight Returns, your Killing Joke, or any of your favourites and you still won't convince me. Batman Adventures and Mad Love are just the very best of Batman.

Batman Adventures
(Oct 1992- Oct 1995, 36 issues
2 annuals and 3 specials)

In the 80-year history of Batman, there are many, many incredible comics, many wonderful graphic novels and you'll find plenty of lists out there that talk about what are considered the greatest Batman stories. You'll soon find mention of all the favourites, whether that's Frank Miller and Klaus Janson's Dark Knight Returns, Alan Moore and Brian Bolland's Killing Joke, Frank Miller and David Mazzucchelli's Batman: Year One. Or perhaps you prefer Arkham Asylum, Hush, The Man Who Laughs, The Court Of Owls, Strange Apparitions, Gotham By Gaslight, Batman Year 100, Son of the Demon... oh, I could simply keep going until I run out of space here.

Yet, in all those best of Batman lists you could find, I doubt you'd find MY favourite Batman series or my favourite Batman graphic novel. But, despite all that, I will sit down and argue with anyone who disagrees that there has never been a better run of Batman stories than you'll find in the world of The Batman Adventures.

Developed as an adaptation of the Bruce Timm/ Eric Randomski helmed Batman Animated Series that debuted just before the comic in 1992, The Batman Adventures was simply a breath of fresh air that enchanted me at a time when I was rapidly falling out of love with superhero comics.

By 1992, we'd gone through the era of Watchmen, Dark Knight Returns et al and we were seeing titles such as DC's Swamp Thing, Hellblazer, Animal Man, and Doom Patrol spearheading a move into more mature comics that would, a year later, see the launch of the DC Vertigo imprint. But in terms of straight superhero comics, the late 80s/early 90s weren't the best of times. Everything just seemed miserable, as a succession of lesser talents looked at the revolutionary superhero works of Watchmen and Dark Knight Returns and jumped on board, with each new title seeming to give new meaning to the law of diminishing returns. Batman was no exception, with every new writer wanting to do something grimmer and grittier than

the last. Alongside this, the early 90s were the Image Comics years, where every new title featured superstar artists cranking out hyper-exaggerated mockeries of comics, full of splash pages, throwing anatomy out the window and just drawing whatever they thought looked cool, whether it suited the story or added anything to the flow of the pages of story.

And then came The Batman Adventures, something as far away from both the grim and gritty superheroes of Marvel and DC and the exaggerated Image style as you could get. In the style of the animated series, the comic was full of stylish yet beautifully simple artwork, a lesson in fabulously spare storytelling that did everything it needed to without being showy or overdoing things. In a superhero world I no longer enjoyed it was a bright light of beautiful, simple, perfect comics and swiftly became the best and then the only superhero series I could look at during those dark days.

The early issues were drawn by Ty Templeton and Brad Rader and written by Kelley Puckett and Marty Pasko, but from issue 7 all the way through to the end of Volume 1, issue 36 (bar a few later issues - 29-31, 33), writer Puckett and inker Rich Burchett were joined by the incredibly talented penciller and cover artist Mike Parobeck. His art simply stood out as a beacon of clarity from a superb draughtsman and storyteller.

The Batman Adventures was driven by simplicity, fun yet intelligent, designed to be appealing to children, yet never talking down, making it an absolute delight to read, whatever your age. Puckett created excellent stories, usually self-contained in one issue. And Parobeck's artwork matched the stories all the way, often working on 4/5 panel pages yet always delivering thrilling and inventive storytelling.

PAROBECK'S ARTWORK MATCHED THE STORIES ALL THE WAY

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The comic showed just what could be accomplished from wonderful storytelling from writers and artists who could craft great stories with an economy and simplicity that belied the incredible craft involved. In another world, Parobeck would be seen in the same way as Jaime Hernandez, a huge influence on his work. But there was also a knowledge of the greats, with elements of someone like Alex Toth's ability to craft a page of amazing clarity and informational depth with simple strokes. Sadly, Parobeck passed away in 1996, a victim of diabetes at the far too young age of 30, yet his artwork, often criticised as 'too cartoony' in his lifetime become not only celebrated but influential. Mike Parobeck really is an artist who deserves far more recognition than he receives.

Batman Adventures
Mad Love (Feb 1994)

And then, in the middle of this incredible run of The Batman Adventures comics, the creators of the Batman Animated TV series came together to produce what would come to be what I think of as the best Batman graphic novel of all time - Mad Love. Written by Bruce Timm and Paul Dini, with art by Timm and Glen Murakami, Mad Love told the tale of poor Harley Quinn, a Timm/Dini creation from the animated series.

Desperately in love with her boss, The Joker, Mr J, Harley's willing to do anything for him, suffer anything for him, anything to make him happy, or simply get his attention. And that's the crux of the tale, as poor Harley hatches a brilliant plan to capture Batman, to give her love the one thing he's never managed to get for himself. Surely Mr J would love her then? Sadly, for poor, poor Harley, the answer was always no.

Mad Love is a truly magnificent thing, full of all the beautifully realised art style that came from the animated show, the same clarity and effortlessly simple yet wonderfully effective storytelling that made The Batman Adventures monthly comic such a delight. But, with the bigger page count, Dini and Timm get to tell a fabulous yarn, part Harley's origin tale, part a fun-filled romp, and part a strangely melancholic and sad exploration of unfulfilled, obsessive love.

However, there are a couple of issues that have to be addressed with Mad Love. Firstly, the easy one, is it a graphic

THE BEST BATMAN GRAPHIC NOVEL OF ALL TIME... MAD LOVE

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novel? Yes, I call it my favourite Batman graphic novel, but as a 60-ish page comic, it's a bit of a reach. Thing is, it's about the same size as Moore and Bolland's The Killing Joke and no-one seems to argue about that being a graphic novel. Maybe graphic novella, maybe just favourite Batman album, to adopt a European flavor of format naming, but it still stands as my favourite Batman graphic novel (and it's my choice so I get to argue it's my favourite Batman graphic novel, graphic novella, collection, whatever. Since the initial publication, things have become simpler, as there's now both a deluxe hardcover version and a collection, Mad Love & Other Stories, where it's bundled in with some other, almost as excellent tales from other Batman Adventures Specials and Annuals.

The other thing is a more problematic one. As I say, it's a tale of Harley's obsessional love, but taken another way, it's a tale of the mentally and physically abusive relationship between Harley and Joker. And there are just too many times where that relationship is played, uncomfortably, for laughs. But, what I think is the saving grace of the book, the thing that makes me love it so much, is that Harley is also setting off on her journey out of this abusive relationship, a journey with setbacks and relapses certainly, but a journey to a better life nonetheless. It's a problematic graphic novel, but many of the very best examples from the past often are. And whilst you can criticise Dini and Timm's portrayal of Harley Quinn in Mad Love, you can't deny that they have also managed to tell a tale of a rounded, fabulous character, full of contradictions and delights, of madness, of sadness, whose story is not only relatable but hopeful. Harley is a fabulous character and it's thanks to the foundations created here that she's become such a hugely popular character in the decades that have followed.

The Batman Adventures and Batman Adventures: Mad Love are two perfect examples of Batman comics that go against the prevailing styles of the time to create works that have proved timeless, wonderful, and character defining moments. In the history of Batman, these will stand out, whether it's 80, 100, hopefully 200 years that we're celebrating.

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BATMAN 1989

'Winged freak, terrorises...? ***Wait 'til they get a load of me!'***

"Vronk!" "Zap!" "Kapow!!!"

Remember these sound effects from the Batman television show? Batman and his trusty ward Robin would hit the villains so hard that the sound effects would manifest themselves onscreen, and in glorious technicolour too. Well that was the problem with Batman, in that everyone who even thought of the Caped Crusader would automatically think of Adam West from the sixties show, and as great and high camp as the show was, outside of the comic reading members of society, that was what the public at large thought Batman was all about.

Batman eventually returned to his darker roots at the start of the seventies, thanks to the creative team of Denny O'Neill and Neal Adams. But this was in the comics. Fledgling film producer Michael Uslan, a lifelong comic, and in particular, Batman fan, needed to put some distance between the light-heartedness of the show and the public's interpretation of Batman. Unfortunately when he was gearing up to try and first get Gotham's guardian onto the big screen, it was 1979, and just like everyone else, film studios thought of Batman as something of a joke.

Uslan was turned away time and again. The road to the silver screen was a rocky one indeed, and it became a marathon more than a sprint. It wasn't until 1986 when Frank Miller and Lynn Varley's Dark Knight Returns burst onto the comic scene in such a dynamic way that got people's heads turning. At last, here was something that showed Batman's potential, and the thing is they hadn't has that far to search. All they had to do was pare back all the baggage that Batman had accrued in his history to that date and find the essence that made the character so readable in the first place.

After this, Miller created Batman Year One, in the Batman comics and there was no coming back from that. It told the definitive tale of Bruce Wayne's one man war on crime, and how he set about creating his dual identity of Batman.

It was clear, however that a new approach was needed for the cinema-going public to want to lay down their money and actually see this iteration of Batman. And looking back now, some thirty years since the film's release, it's easy to see how the

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film became a tent pole for every blockbuster movie that followed in its wake. 1989's Batman was not just a potential money-spinner, although that was obviously one of the plusses, this film had to be something altogether different. This wasn't just a film…it became an event!

Up and coming directors such as Joe Dante and Ivan Reitman were eager to get on-board the Batman train, yet the job finally went to relatively unknown Tim Burton. Burton originally worked at Disney, and his animated short, Frankenweenie put him on people's radar. Pee Wee's Big Adventure followed, but it was his off-the-wall horror comedy, Beetlejuice, which he made for Warners, the people who already owned the rights to the Batman, that clinched the deal for him.

The word on the street as the film started gearing up momentum was that camp was most definitely out. Grim and gritty, with a generous side salad of verisimilitude was in. Ok, so who was going to don the cowl and strike fear into Gotham's criminal underworld? Do they get a brand name, one that will ensure bums on seats, or go the same route as they did when Christopher Reeve was cast to play Batman's stablemate, Superman back in 1978? Rumours were rife that at one point Mel Gibson was attached to the part, but eventually it turned out he was unavailable due to commitments to the lethal Weapon franchise.

Also, they were considering comic actor Bill Murray for the part, but in the end the answer happened to be somewhere in-between, and to say there was something of a backlash to Warner Bros choice by the fans is something of an understatement. Now you have to remember that this was years before the planet devouring monster that would come to be known as social media was even thought of. Warners were inundated with over 50,000 letters from outraged fans at the final choice, and the howl of derision was so loud that it made the cover of the Wall Street Journal in November of 1988. So much for free publicity!

And just who was the actor who was suddenly taking all the flack? Well it was Mr Mom himself…Michael Keaton.

The public at large couldn't make out whether this new Batman was going to be another knockabout affair like the TV show all those years before. Even producer Uslan thought that Burton's choice for Bruce Wayne was something of a, well, a joke! But when asked about why he had cast Keaton, Burton's reply was simple: All you had to do was look in Keaton's eyes to see that there was something going on underneath. Since he would be wearing a cowl to hide his features, the eyes had to be expressive, plus on top of that Keaton was a damn fine serious actor to boot.

But there was still tension in the camp as to the direction the film was taking. So the next question on everyone's lips was who the bad guy was going to be, and just who would be playing him. From Batman's eclectic Rogues Gallery there was only one foe he could really face off against, the yin to his yang, The Joker.

And there was only one name on the producer's and director's lips that could play the Clown Prince of Crime…Jack Nicholson. Producer Jon Peters had worked with Nicholson before on the Witches of Eastwick, and according to him he was the only actor for the role. Finally, Nicholson acquiesced, and now with his name attached the film, though still in pre-production, it gained a fair amount of gravitas, pretty much like Superman did when Marlon Brando added his considerable weight (no pun intended) to playing Kal El's father.

The next character to be cast was perhaps the biggest of all; Gotham City. If the world ever needed an enema, Gotham would be where they stuck the pipe! Forget the squeaky clean, sun kissed streets of glorious Gotham from the Adam West era; Burton's Gotham became the reason why Batman existed in the first place. Corrupt, depraved, and basically another name for Hell, Gotham had to look like no other city that had graced the silver screen before. Warners turned to production designer Anton Furst to bring a brooding menace to the bottomless steel and concrete canyons of Batman's hunting ground. Furst's Gotham felt savage, almost bestial, its cantilevered rooftops blocking out the sun and keeping its citizens in a shadow of perpetual fear.

And what's more, the place became a reality. Built on the spacious backlots of Pinewood Studios, the Gotham City set stretched for more than a quarter of a mile, at one point holding the title of the biggest practical film set ever built, even surpassing that of 1963's Cleopatra! With a crew of 200 craftsmen, it took only 5 months to complete the main street of Gotham. Rising two floors only, the effects of looming skyscrapers would later be achieved by the age old effect of matte paintings.

As stated before, the road to getting Batman to the big screen was a long and arduous one, taking ten years for the Dark Knight Detective to finally make it. But shooting the film took only three months through the winter of 1988, and that's including the Christmas break. There were plenty of script alterations as the shooting progressed, with many ideas abandoned altogether and at one point it's rumoured that they didn't even know how the film was going to end. You have to admire how cohesive the end result was considering the break neck schedule and constant script revisement.

All the while the shoot progressed through the cold winter nights on Pinewood's backlot; the marketing monster was getting up a head of steam, preparing for the summer of '89 release date. Anything and everything had the Bat logo stamped on it, from bubble bath to boxer shorts. It

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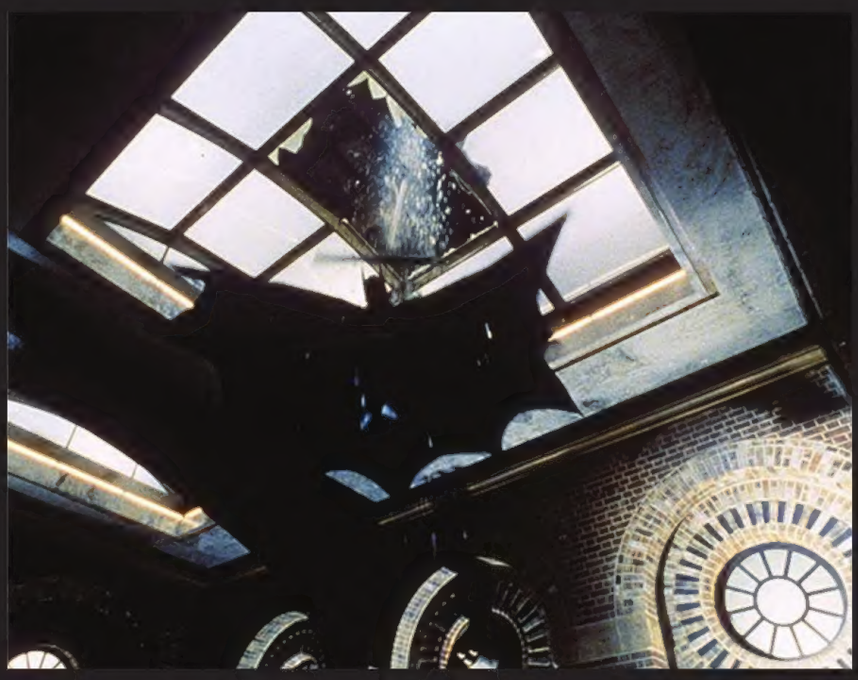

became a veritable tidal wave as Bat-Fever gripped the nation, and it wasn't just the kids scrambling to get their paws on the stuff.

The only other time something like this had been seen was back in 1977 and the release of a small film called Star Wars. But then it was the sudden popularity of the film which spawned the toy lines and other memorabilia that followed in its wake. And this was what made Star Wars creator George Lucas a very rich man indeed. Ultimately the difference between Lucas and Warners was that Lucas made a small film, not knowing it would capture the zeitgeist at the time, and in doing so ended up making a blockbuster.

Warners on the other hand were intentionally setting out to make a blockbuster from the get go.

But there was still a certain amount of negativity surrounding the production, so to quell people's fears Warners took the decision to put out a teaser trailer, a taster of what was to come. But they rushed it, and looking at the trailer now, some thirty years later it's safe to say that Warners got away with it by the skin of their teeth, as they lashed together what amounts to little more than a series of jump cuts, showing quick snippets of action and glimpses of a Bat shaped vigilante. The trailer didn't even have any music!

But it must have ticked all the right boxes for it whipped the fans into frenzy and left us all clamouring for more. A lot of my friends were ringing our local fleapit, asking the times of when the Batman trailer was being shown, and with what film, then going into the screening, seeing the trailer and leaving without staying to watch the film. At least I managed to stay and get my monies worth by sitting through the main feature. (For those of you out there who may be interested in knowing, it was Dirty Rotten Scoundrels, an apt choice of film as sixteen years later, Michael Caine would go on to portray Alfred Pennyworth, Batman's very own Batman.)

Music duties finally went to Danny Elfman who had worked with Burton on two previous occasions, and his gothic overtures leant an off kilter mood to the proceedings, though the rousing main hero theme roared with ominous gusto, providing an ambience of mood and mystery. Prince supplied a full soundtrack of songs to accompany the musical themes, which sold by the bucket load. And it was pure coincidence that he was already under the Warner label!

Music with dark overtones is all well and good, but would Batman himself reflect the change in mood? Well the answer was a big fat yes, with Michael Keaton donning an all-black muscle suit designed by costume designer Bob Ringwood. The body suit was made of Lycra with a foamed muscle cast glued over the top giving the idea of armoured protection. Gone were the garish colours of the Adam West era; gone were the underpants on the outside of the tights.

In its place was a black shadow that seemingly absorbed the light, a pillar of muscled darkness capped off by a demonic cowl with long Bats ears, capable of instilling fear into evildoers everywhere. Cloaked in wings of ebony, Batman was well and truly back where he belonged; in the shadows.

As effective as the suit was, it had the unfortunate and rather negative effect on the actor underneath, which only helped him get into character, but in an altogether unusual way. For starters it limited Keaton's body movements, so much so that when the cowl was bolted into place, he couldn't even turn his head, having to twist from the waist to look to his left and right. It ended up being called the "Bat-turn," and while it looks dramatic it turned out to be a pain in the Bat-posterior.

At the same time, the cowl made Mr Keaton practically deaf, adding to an increasing sense of claustrophobia since the cowl limited his peripheral vision too. Keaton later said that in order to cope with the restrictions of the Bat-suit, it left him with no other choice than to channel his emotions inwards, and this gave us a focussed, almost obsessed Dark Knight.

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"Warners had splurged a **huge budget** for this production, sparing **no expense**, and it was all up on the screen for all to see"

All the gadgetry that comes with Batman's formidable arsenal had to be practically made, so they turned to John Evans, who has previously worked on such films as the James Bond Movies, as well as Raiders of the Lost Ark. Ninja wheels, Batarangs, and a multi-purpose speargun for ensnaring criminals or allowing Batman to scale the sides of buildings all had to work in the physical world, as did Joker's assortment of acid squirting paraphernalia. And so well made were they by Evans and his crew that they gave the belief that each item actually worked. You have to remember that this was long before all the computerised imaging and effects the directors and technicians of today have at their fingertips.

Action films of this nature always relied on model work for certain sequences, and modelling effects guru Derek Meddings fashioned in miniature scale Batman's various vehicles, including the Batwing which soared through the canyons of Gotham near the film's explosive finale. Meddings, a veteran of such cult British shows as Stingray and Thunderbirds was more than up to the task of making it all so realistic. And of course where Batman goes, so does the Batmobile, and working from Anton Furst's designs, John Evan's team created a car that any man, whether he was a Bat fan or not, would give their eye teeth to own.

Created by a team of 12 technicians in a record breaking 3 months, the end was result was a sleek battering ram of a car, with Bat fins on the back to add to the brooding menace it exuded, and it was stocked to the gills with added extras that puts Batman's famed utility belt to shame. The vehicle seemed to be an extension of the crime fighting vigilante, as Furst outdid himself by giving it a timeless quality, and clocking in at a whopping 20 feet in length, and being 8 feet wide, this Batmobile had only one thing on its mechanical mind; intimidation.

Warners had splurged a huge budget for this production, sparing no expense, and it was all up on the screen for all to see, and it seemed that their idea of spending money in order to make money paid off or them in spades.

And so the summer of '89 was soon with us, though we Bat-Fans in the UK had to wait a little longer than the US, who got to see the film almost two full months before us. But August 11th finally arrived, and I, just like everyone else, stood in line, (which was practically half way down the high street!) to get to see the Dark Knight on the big screen for the first time.

And was it worth waiting for?

Hell yes. Nothing like it had quite been seen before, and in many ways it set the standard for all super hero films to follow. It was incredibly successful for Warners, and indeed for all involved in the production, both in front and behind the cameras.

Story wise it's a little weak, and there are a few inconsistencies in there that irk the Bat-Fans, and yes that does include me. For instance, if trusted Butler Alfred, played devilishly straight by Michael Gough, had shown Kim Basinger's Vicki Vale into the Batcave, he'd have been picking up his P45 the next morning!

And don't get me started on a young Jack Napier (Joker's civilian identity) killing Bruce Wayne's parents, thereby creating Batman in the first place, and later Batman not being able to save an adult Napier into falling into the toxic waste, only to emerge as the Joker!

Did I just give the plot away? I think it's safe to say that after thirty years pretty much anyone who wants to see it…has. And here's the difference between Batman and other so called blockbusters of the day; if, for example you take a film like Back to the Future, it stuck

around in cinemas for months, generating its grosses and cult status by sheer perseverance and being a damn fine film into the bargain. Batman was here and gone in a flash, making a gazillion Dollars in no time at all then disappearing from cinemas like a shadow in the night. No film had really done this before in such a way, and this was seemingly the way to go for all the big film studios.

And seeing the successes of the Batman film, Warners competitors, realising there was life in these colourfully clad characters from the silly books, all started shouting, "Where can I get me one of those?"

And as we all know now, Superhero films have gone from strength to strength. Whether they have the legs to last the course remains to be seen. All film genres go through cycles of being in vogue, whether it's Westerns or Crime films, the public only take so much before becoming bored and wanting something fresh to cleanse the cinematic palate. But one thing is certain, in that way back in 1989, Tim Burton's Batman started all ball rolling, how long that ball can keep up its momentum remains to be seen. But remember, all you have to do is shine the signal in the sky from atop Gotham Police headquarters, and rest assured that the Batman will always return…

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